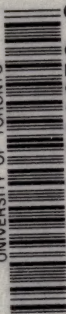


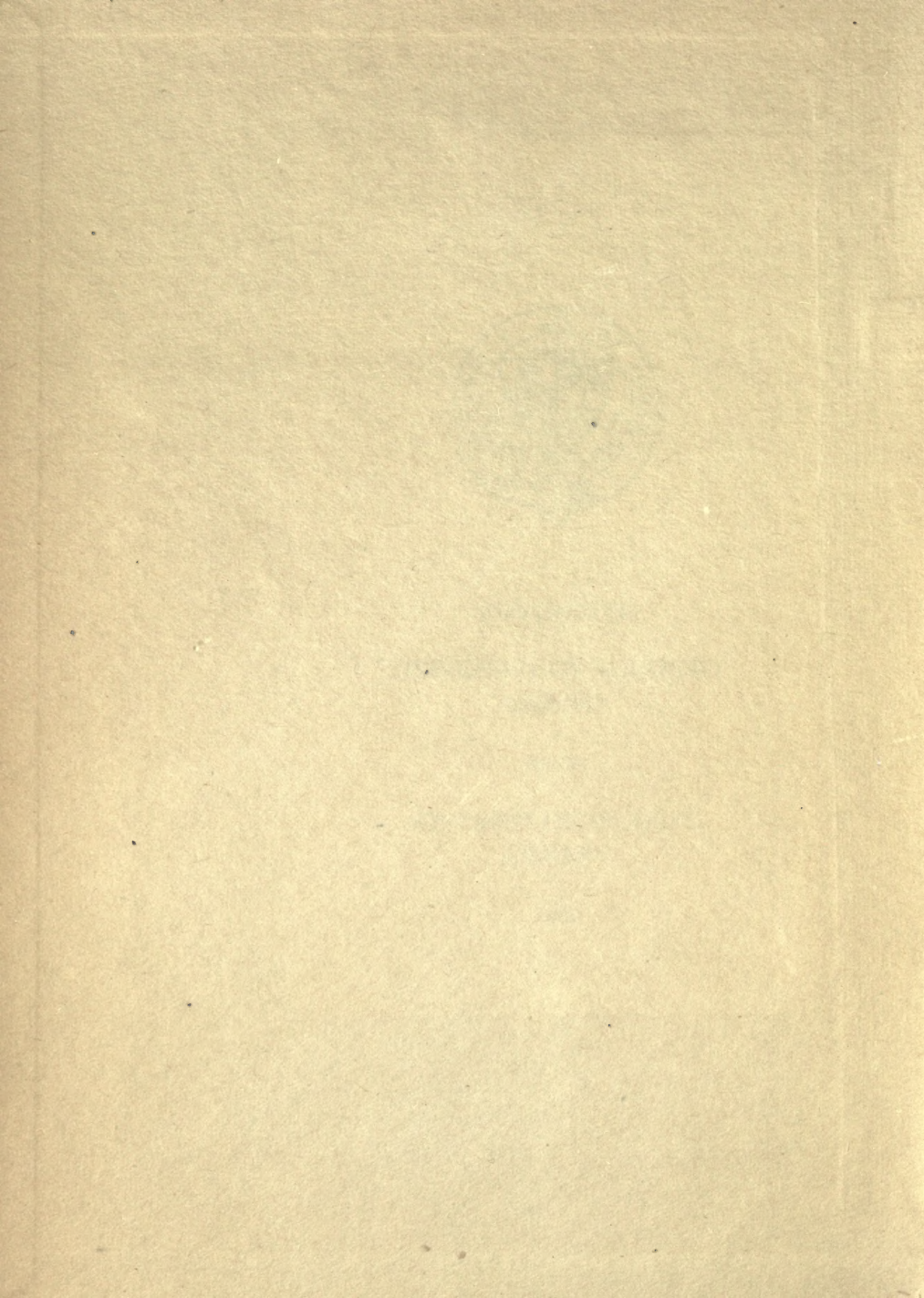
THE OLD MIRACLE PLAYS OF ENGLAND

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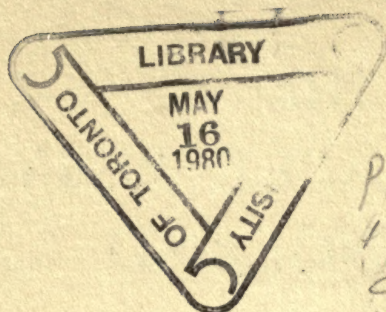
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PREFACE

IN the hope of bringing the actual presentment of Mediaeval Miracle Plays more vividly before the minds of children, I have cast information concerning them into the form of a story. But, while this method of dealing with the plays may prove to the childish reader more interesting and palatable than a mere summary of what is known concerning them, it leads to certain liberties difficult to avoid in fiction.

It seemed, to take an example, in some ways more convenient to lay the scene of the little story in York. Yet many of the Wakefield and Coventry plays lend themselves to description better than those of the York series. However, when in the course of the tale I have made use of an alien play, I have taken care to mention the fact, and to invent a reason (plausible enough, I trust, in a story) for its performance at York.

Again, the stage directions for some of these old plays are so vague that the precise manner of their presentment must be left to individual imagination and common sense. In a story there is no room for

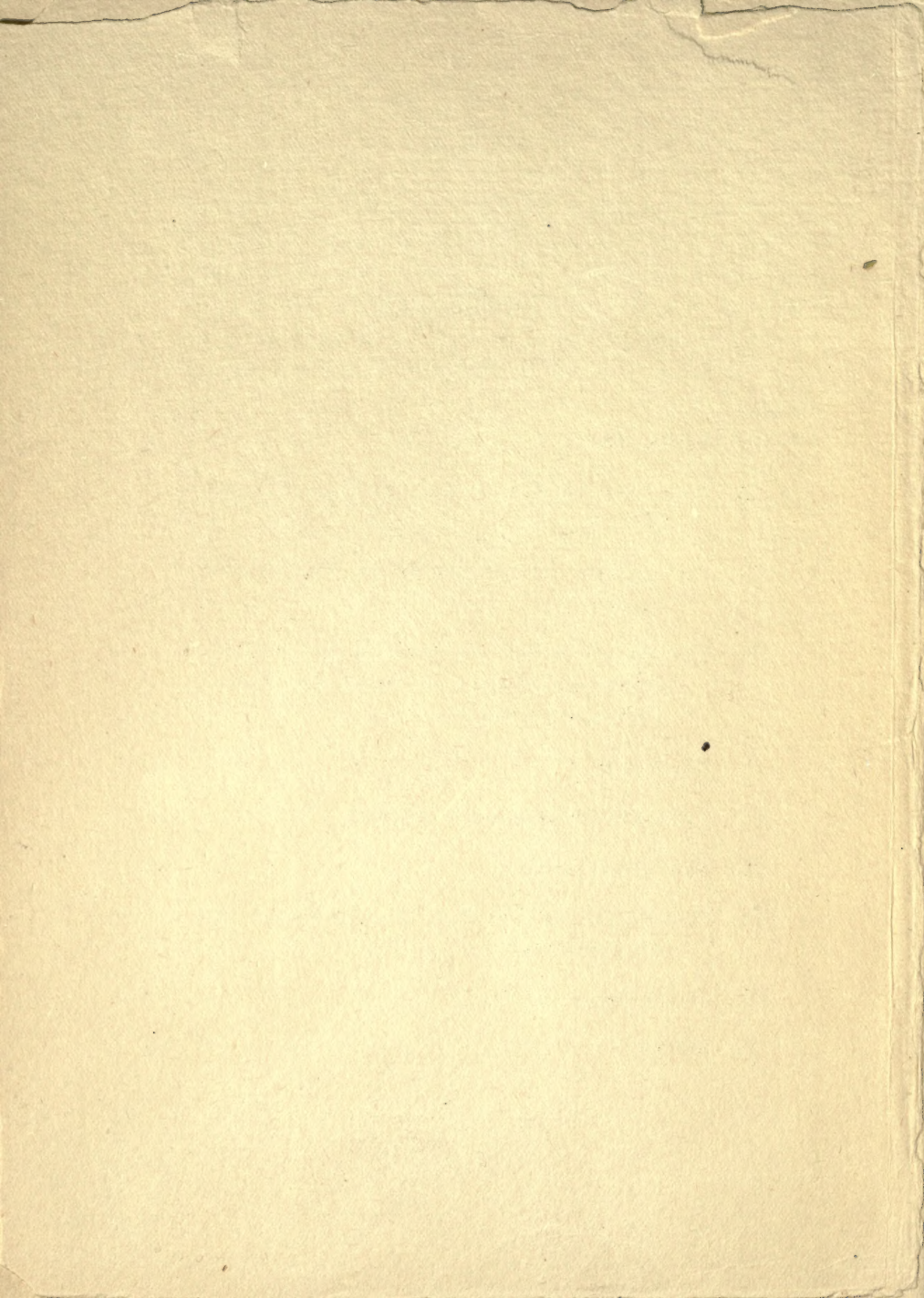
tentative speculations, nor for suggested alternative treatments; and this being the case, I trust I may be forgiven if occasionally I handle my material overconfidently. This explanation is offered to older students, to whom, simple as it is, my little summary, compiled from the recognized authorities on the subject of miracle plays, may yet be of some value. In writing it I found most helpful and delightful Mr. Sidney W. Clarke's book, *The Miracle Play in Englan*, and, written by Mr. Ernest Rhys, the preface to *Everyman*, in *Everyman's Library*. To both these gentlemen my thanks are specially due.

N. S.

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THE OLD MIRACLE PLAYS OF ENGLAND



I

INTRODUCTION

OF all the delightful games which children play in the nursery or in the schoolroom, perhaps the favourite one is dressing-up, and acting. And of all the Christmas treats, perhaps the best is going to the theatre—either to the pantomime or to one of the fairy plays which fortunate children can now enjoy.

There are grown-up people too who never get tired of dressing-up and acting, nor of going to the theatre to see other people act. It is a taste which is shared by children and grown-up people alike. And it has always been so. Long, long ago, when all the people in the world were savage, there is no doubt that little naked children picked up their fathers' spears, and bows and arrows (or made smaller ones in imitation of them), and "acted" the hunting

of animals or the killing of enemies, while their parents looked on, pleased and interested by the performance.

Thousands of years have passed since the first "acting" took place on some lonely beach, perhaps, or in a clearing of the forest where savage children played; and now in all our big towns we have big houses specially built for acting, and there are many men and women who spend most of their time either in writing plays or in learning and acting them.

Every evening in London hundreds of cabs and motor-cars stop before some brilliantly lighted theatre to set down people who have come to see one of the many plays performed night after night in this great city. And seven hundred years ago people also crowded to see plays in London, though it was a very different London then, and a very different building at which they arrived.

Instead of ladies in evening gowns, and gentlemen all dressed alike in black coats, stepping out of cabs and motor-cars to walk across a pavement to the theatre door, you would have seen, on certain days long ago, a curiously dressed crowd of men, women, and children, some on horseback, some on foot, all pressing in one direction. There would be barefooted monks, soldiers with breastplates and helmets of steel, nuns with white caps and veils, little boys with long stockings, one red, one green perhaps, and short tunics belted at the waist; ladies with full

flowing robes and strange head-dresses, some pointed like a sugar-loaf, some with veils arranged over a frame in the shape of two horns. And all these people in their quaint and varying costumes would be threading their way through narrow, dirty streets, like lanes, between overhanging houses, till they stopped—not before a big lighted house with play-bills outside, and a marble hall and gilded ceiling with doors leading to the theatre within—but in front of the great gates of a church, and that church might have been Westminster Abbey. For there the play they had come to see was to be performed!

Strange as it may seem to us now, the first theatres in England were the churches, and, as you may guess, the first plays to be acted were religious plays.

Let us try to understand the reason for this. You remember that William I conquered England in 1066—eight hundred years ago. Well, from the time that he and his followers came to this country the English race has been gradually growing into the nation to which we belong and into the sort of people we see round us every day. Even the very poorest English children nowadays go to school and can read and write. Children whose parents are not so poor learn much besides reading and writing, and thousands of the sons and daughters of rich or fairly well-to-do people go to college, and spend years of their life in study. So that now, in the twentieth century, English people are on the whole *educated*. But it



has taken a very long time to arrive at such a state of things as this, and for hundreds of years after the Conquest, not only the poor, but even the richer and quite rich people were ignorant. Very few men except those who belonged to the Church studied at all. Thousands of the rest could neither read nor write.

Now very naturally the Church considered that *religion* at least must in some way be taught and explained to these masses of ignorant folk. Whatever else they knew, or did not know, it was necessary that they should understand the faith they professed. They called themselves Christians, yet how were people who could not read, to learn even the Bible stories, or anything at all about the teaching of CHRIST?

"They might go to the churches," you will say, perhaps, "where the Bible would be read to them by the priests." But *that* would not do. For remember that for hundreds of years after the Conquest the service was always read in Latin, a language which very few people except lawyers, priests, and scholars understood. No doubt, so far as they could, the clergy privately explained the teaching of the Church to as many people as they could reach. But thousands and thousands of them were never reached privately at all. They just came to church on Sundays and on Saints' days, and went away without any real knowledge of what the services meant.

Services were
in Latin

It was a difficult problem, yet the monks and clergy conquered it. They thought of a way of teaching for which no books were necessary. A way moreover, by which hundreds of people could learn at the same time, merely by using their eyes and their ears. The life of CHRIST, the lives of the Saints, the whole Bible history, they discovered, could be shown to the people in the form of plays or acted stories. The clergy should write the plays, they agreed, and the clergy themselves should act them!

It was a clever idea, cleverly carried out. In various monasteries monks began to write and to arrange such plays, to be acted in the churches on special days, at special pauses in the service.

At first the religious scenes they prepared were very simple, and performed chiefly in dumb show.

We know, for instance, of one little play that was acted about eight hundred years ago in a church dedicated to S. Nicholas.

Now the priests of that church were naturally anxious for the people in their charge to know as much as possible about the saint—their own special saint, whose name they mentioned every time they spoke of the church.

On the feast day of S. Nicholas therefore, before the service began, they removed from its niche the stone image of the saint, and in its place a priest stood, dressed as much like the statue as possible.

That was the beginning of the story. The rest

had to be explained by acting. Not only was S. Nicholas the special saint of children, he was also the protector of travellers, and the play was meant to show how powerful he was in this respect, and what miracles he could work for those who put their trust in him.

The usual service was begun, and then, at a stated time, a pause was made. The church doors were thrown open, and a priest dressed as a traveller from a distant land, came in and bowed before the shrine of S. Nicholas. The priest represented a heathen who had heard of the saint's power, and wanted to discover whether all he had been told was true. His flowing robes and his jewelled turban showed the audience that he came from a foreign land, and was not a Christian. Presently, from the folds of his robe, this man took a rich treasure, and placing it at the feet of the saint, told him that he was going on a journey, and prayed him to guard the wealth he left in his keeping. Then he went his way out of the church.

But no sooner had he departed, than other priests dressed as robbers, crept in, and stealing up to the shrine, took the treasure and hurried away with their booty. Meanwhile, the heathen, who felt uneasy about leaving his wealth in the saint's care, returned to make quite sure of its safety and finding the treasure gone, began to storm and rave. He was proceeding to beat and insult the image, when to

his amazement it moved! Stepping down from the niche, it went out to seek the robbers who were hidden just outside the church. So terrified were they at the approach of a living saint when as they thought, only a statue had watched their theft, that they immediately restored the treasure, and tremblingly followed S. Nicholas into the church. The heathen, overjoyed and full of awe and wonder, fell at the saint's feet. Then S. Nicholas bade him become a Christian, and worship the true God.

So the play ended, and the interrupted service went on.

Simple as it was, the little scene no doubt persuaded the congregation that S. Nicholas was a great and powerful personage, and the impression it made upon them was one they were not likely to forget, because of the strange and interesting manner in which the lesson was taught.

This is the first play we know anything about, but we may guess that others more or less like it, began to be very popular, for we find from old books—books written hundreds of years ago, that twice a year at least, at Christmas and at Easter, the people were taught by means of acting, two of the greatest events in the life of CHRIST.

Let us try to imagine a Christmas Eve in Westminster Abbey, long ago, when Henry III was king. The Abbey was not nearly so large then as it is to-day, for much of it has been built since. Yet

the central part was finished, and six hundred years ago people looked up at some of the same soaring arches, and leant against some of the same pillars as those we now see in the beautiful church.

The Abbey bells had been ringing for a long time, calling the Londoners from their homes, and from the crooked narrow lanes of the city, through the gates in the walls which then surrounded Westminster, there had come flocking to the church a great crowd of gentle and simple folk. There were merchants and shopkeepers, wearing hoods like jelly-bags with their long points dangling at the back; ladies with strange fantastic head-dresses; poor women and children muffled in cloaks; soldiers, nobles, and monks of various orders. Some of them stood thronging the aisles, others knelt on stools, or beside wooden benches.

The church was dark and mysterious. Only on the altars, candles blazed like golden stars, and above them the arches rose stretching up into the gloom overhead. The air was full of a sweet heavy scent—the scent of incense.

Near the altar, surrounded by gleaming lights, the people could see a rough cradle shaped like a manger, and beside it, dressed in long robes, an image of the Virgin Mary.

Then from the side-doors leading to the space about the altar, there entered, in twos and threes, men dressed as shepherds, holding crooks, and driving before them

real sheep. They were followed by dogs, who kept the flock together, running round them, and ordering them in the wonderful way of sheep-dogs. Some of the shepherds lay down as though to sleep. Others watched their flock, wide awake and talking amongst themselves.

Suddenly, while interested and curious the congregation looked on, a blast of trumpets rang out, and before the startling sound had died away, echoing through the aisles and the arches, an angel in a robe of rose colour, with big white wings, appeared in the pulpit. Very sweet and clear his voice sounded as he announced tidings of great joy. *Christ was born in Bethlehem.*

Then, somewhere from the darkness above, there followed, in a burst of song, the voices of the angels.

"Glory to God in the highest," they sang, "and on earth, peace, good will toward men."

Can you not imagine how the children gazed up through the gloom, expecting to see the white-winged angels hovering down towards them? And though the grown-up people knew that the music came from the singing boys placed in a gallery high up over the windows, they too must have felt that the message was a heavenly one, and many of them were filled with awe. And now, when the beautiful voices were silent, the shepherds began to crowd towards the altar. There, kneeling before the manger, they adored the Baby and

His Mother, and afterwards, walking in procession through the church, past the watching crowd, they sang a hymn of praise.

This was the scene which in numberless churches all over England took place six hundred years ago on Christmas Eve, and even now a memory of it dwells at Christmas-time in many churches.

Nearly every church in Roman Catholic countries gives up one of its little chapels to a representation of the stable at Bethlehem. The actors are no longer real, but figures of Joseph and Mary and the shepherds take their place.

In Italy, the Christmas "manger scene" in the churches is often very elaborate. I remember one in a church just outside Florence, before which there was always a crowd of little children staring in delight. The whole of a tiny chapel was turned into a sort of cave or grotto, with winding paths from the heights, down which came figures to represent the Wise Men from the East, with toy camels and leopards following them. In the midst of the grotto there was a straw-filled manger, and in it lay the Baby Jesus. The Virgin Mary with clasped hands knelt beside it, and Joseph, leaning on his staff, looked over her shoulder at the Child. A group of shepherds with crooks knelt near the Holy Family, while their woolly toy flocks were huddled round them.

At Easter-time also, six hundred years ago, the people in England were taught by means of acting that

Easter means the Resurrection of CHRIST from the dead.

Before the altar, a grave was prepared, and at a certain part of the service, choristers, representing the women who went to the sepulchre, walked up the aisle, bearing the spices and the ointments. When they arrived at the grave, they found seated beside it an angel, who said, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen."

Then the story as it is told in the Bible went on, acted by the clergy, till one of them, representing CHRIST Himself, appeared to the rest, announcing that He had risen from the grave. At this point the whole choir burst into songs of "Alleluia," and the play ended.

Like the "manger scene," a memory of this old play persists in some religious customs which still linger. In Italy, if you go to any of the churches just before Easter, you will see in front of one of the altars something that looks like a little garden of flowers. There are tubs of blossoming shrubs; masses of tulips and daffodils and anemones, some in pots, some in jars of water, and amongst the flowers you will find, cut in wood perhaps, and painted to look as real as possible, the spear, the nails, the cross—all the terrible things that were used at the Crucifixion. And this little "arranged" plot of colour and scent is called *The Sepulchre*. The Easter play is acted no more, but it is a beautiful thought to make a *garden* in memory of it,

to show that death is conquered. For the "sepulchre" holds not death, but life—the lovely life of flowers.

This, you see, is another way of teaching people the meaning of the Resurrection.

The first plays, then, were religious plays, and they were acted in churches. But soon they grew so popular, and so many people crowded to see them, that the churches were not large enough to contain the throng, and by degrees the custom grew up of acting them *outside* the church, so that they might be seen by a much larger audience than the building itself could hold.

From a very old play in which stage directions are given, we are able to understand how the performance was arranged. The story of this play is The Disobedience of Eve, and the loss of Paradise through her sin.

Just below one of the windows of the church, supported by scaffolding, a platform was put up. From this platform, steps led to a lower stage, and there was a space between this under platform and the ground.

Thus the church itself stood for Heaven. The first platform was Paradise, the second Earth, and the space beneath it, Hell. So that when GOD the FATHER descended from Heaven to walk in the garden of Paradise "in the cool of the day," the priest who represented Him, came from the church window to

the "Paradise" platform. And when Adam and Eve, having tasted of the fruit, were driven out of the garden, they descended the steps to the "Earth" stage, and at last to the space below which meant Hell, where in the midst of clouds of smoke, and with great rattling of chains, boys dressed as demons lay in wait for them.

A play such as this must have been a quaint and curious sight, and to us who live so many years after the people who gazed at it from some churchyard long ago, it seems childish and even occasionally horrible. But we are in many ways unlike those homely folk who used to stand open-mouthed in amazement before such a scene. We have read many books, and our ideas about religion have changed so much that it is difficult to imagine how greatly acting, even of this sort, must have impressed the simple minds of men and women who had read nothing, and were often full of fears and superstitions. They were like little children who have to be taught in a way that will fix and hold their attention. Just as a tiny boy or girl is taught its letters with bright and highly coloured picture-blocks.

So far we have seen how these religious plays were at first acted in churches, then came to be performed outside them. Now we shall discover that a further change was presently to be made. As the years passed, people began to expect more and more in the way of acting. They wanted richer dresses for the players,

more scenery, and bigger spaces for the performances. Far from getting tired of these theatrical performances, the taste for them grew, and greater and still greater throngs pressed towards the churchyards every time a play was announced. You will understand how disorder arose, and spread. Rough crowds spoilt the grass in the churchyards, and trampled upon the graves, for the plays began to be looked upon as amusements for a holiday, rather than as religious ceremonies to be watched quietly and with reverence. So in time it was felt that a churchyard was not a fit place for a boisterous throng. It was too near the sacred building, which the people profaned with their noise.

Yet if the plays were removed from the surroundings of the church, it no longer seemed fitting that priests should take part in them. Thus it happened that by the end of the thirteenth century, about the time when Edward I was king, the clergy had left off acting, except at Christmas-time and at Easter, when, as usual, the Nativity scene, and the scene of the Resurrection were performed in the churches. Every other sort of religious play was henceforward acted by the *laity* (that is, by people who, whatever they may be by trade or profession, are not clergy). So a class of men grew up who were paid for acting, and often gained their living in this way alone; and though the plays they acted were still religious plays, the cost of them was borne by rich people, and they were

by degrees made into grand performances, as we shall see.

All through those years which are known as the Middle Ages it was the custom for men who belonged to the same trade to form themselves into a society, or *guild* as it was called, to protect and help one another in their own particular work. Each trade had its own guild, and its own special saint as guardian. There was the Tanners' Guild, the Fishmongers', the Carpenters', the Armourers', the Bakers', and so forth—too many of them to mention. Now many of these guilds in the course of time had become very rich societies, and could afford to spend a great deal of money upon anything that interested them. Plays interested all the townfolk immensely, and so even before the clergy had quite left off acting in them, the guilds began to take the management of these plays into their charge, paying the actors, providing rich and costly dresses, such scenery as could in those days be made, and everything in fact that is known as "stage property."

The priests still *wrote* the stories, but the acting and the whole management of them passed into the care of the rich guilds.

Miracle plays was the name given to these religious "acted stories," and very fortunately, four sets of Miracle plays have been found and preserved, so that we can read the very words spoken by actors long ago to audiences of eager and interested people.

These four sets are the York, Wakefield, Chester, and Coventry plays. Each "set" includes a great many plays—in the York collection, for instance, there are forty-eight—and year after year from the reign of Edward III to the time of Henry VII they were acted at the four towns mentioned. Not in these towns alone either, but all over England ; for if a city had no plays of its own it borrowed one of the York, Chester, Wakefield, or Coventry set.

If we look at the York collection of Miracle plays, it will do as an example of the rest. We find that it begins with the *Story of the Creation of the World*, and all the chief stories of the Old and New Testament follow in proper order. So that, even if he could not read, any one who saw the whole series one after the other, would have a very good idea of all the teaching of the Bible.

Now let us in thought go back to the Middle Ages, and try to picture the scene in some old market-place, soon after Whitsuntide, the time when Miracle plays were generally acted. To help us to do this, let us imagine how the sight of them impressed two out of the thousands of children who with their parents went to see these plays.

II

HOW COLIN AND MARGERY KEPT THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

COLIN and Margery were two children who, five hundred years ago, lived in the country, not far from York. Their father, who had a little farm, held his land from the great lord whose castle with its battlements and turrets stood up proudly on a neighbouring hill, and sometimes the children had seen him when, with a great company of followers, he went hawking, and rode past their cottage.

Now, except for the Lady Alicia, her young children, and a few retainers, the castle stood empty. Its lord, with all his men-at-arms, had gone to fight in the wars with France, for Henry V was king, and, not content with ruling England, he wanted to be King of France as well.

The children's father, Farmer Short, was not rich, but neither was he very poor. The cottage in which he lived with his wife and his little son and daughter was in those days considered comfortable.

It was built of stone, had low walls and a thatched roof, and the kitchen, in which Colin and Margery slept, was paved with stone, and had a wooden ceiling, which Farmer Short could easily touch with his hand.

Neither Colin nor Margery went to school. There was no school nearer than York, some miles distant; and though Margery was nine and Colin ten, they did not even know their letters, and all their lives they never learnt to read. But without going to school there was plenty to do all day long. Colin had to look after the cows and to help his father in the fields; and every morning, besides learning to help her mother in the house, Margery was sent out on to the common to watch the geese, and to drive them back if they strayed too far.

One June evening both the children went to bed in a state of great excitement. The next day was the Feast of Corpus Christi—a festival in honour of the LORD's Supper—and with their father and mother they were to ride into York to see the Miracle plays. The last time they were in church they had smiled at one another when they found it was Trinity Sunday, because they knew that Corpus Christi would come on the following Thursday, four days later. Now the great day was close at hand, and, though they lay down on the little sacks of straw which served them for beds, it was a long time before either of them slept. Colin had once seen the plays, and his sister kept asking him questions about them. What were they

like? What did the people do? What did they say? But Colin's explanations did not satisfy her. He remembered a big man dressed in bright clothes, who stamped and made a great noise, and had a sword. He told her about angels with great white wings, and something also about people with black faces and feathers and claws. But Margery was very little the wiser; and presently, when she found her brother's voice growing drowsier and drowsier, she too curled round on her straw bed and went to sleep.

It was light when she awoke, though the sun had not yet risen; and, jumping up, she shook Colin, who directly he could be made to understand that the day had come, also leaped from his bed and began to struggle with the great bars of the kitchen-door. Just as he managed to undo them and to throw open the door to make quite certain that the morning was fine, his mother, Mistress Short, came clattering down the steps that led from the upper room right into the kitchen.

She wore all her best things. A gown of grey material was looped high over a girdle to show her red stockings and her buckled shoes. On her head there was a white cap, indented over the forehead, and rising into two wings on either side, while folds of linen were brought round her neck under her chin. Over her arm she carried the children's holiday clothes, for this was a great occasion. The whole family was to spend the day at the house of her husband's sister,

Mistress Harpham, a rich glover's wife in York, and Mistress Short was determined to make a good appearance.

Colin and Margery were soon dressed, and if no idea of much washing occurred to them, you must remember that they lived hundreds of years ago, when soap and water were not considered so necessary as they are now. They dipped their heads indeed, into a trough of water in the farmyard just outside, and rubbing their faces with a cloth, were ready to have the finishing-touches put to their clothes. In his long stockings and little brown tunic, Colin looked quite charming, and Margery was very proud of her green frock looped up over a girdle like her mother's. Both children wore little capes of linen, to which a hood was attached, to be buttoned under the chin or left hanging, according to the state of the weather.

Their mother had prepared a meal of cakes and ale, but they were almost too excited to eat and drink, and it was not till their father, who had gone to fetch the horses, appeared, riding on Dobbin and leading Jock, that they could believe they were really going to start.

Margery was soon seated in front of her father on Dobbin's broad saddle, and Colin rode with his mother on Jock, the other farm-horse ; and so, long before the sun rose, they ambled out of the yard into a lane which led to the high road to York.

The sky was clear, the larks were singing, and the wild roses in the hedges were all wet with dew, as they

rode under the arching trees. Soon, however, they turned into the long white road, where already groups of people, some on foot, some on horseback, others in wooden carts, were wending their way to the city, whose walls and gates could be seen in the distance.

Before long they were joined by several friends, and a company of ten or twelve jogged along together, discussing the probable events of the day.

You might find it difficult to understand their conversation if you could hear it now, for though these country people of course spoke English, it was not the English of to-day. Though many of the words were those we know well, there were others which have since fallen out of use, or are pronounced differently; so if I put their talk into the language to which we are accustomed, you must remember that though the sense of it is the same, it was not spoken in just this way.

"Whereabouts does the first play begin?" asked Farmer Short, who had not been to the city for a whole year.

"At the gates of the priory in Mikelgate," said the man who rode next to him.

Master Brigg was a townsman on a visit to his country relations, with whom he was journeying.

"Next, at the door of Robert Harpham," he went on. "Then at Skeldergate End. After that, I don't know. I've forgotten."

Colin pricked up his ears.

"We shan't have to wait long," he whispered, leaning across to Margery. "Aunt Harpham lives close to Mikelgate."

"And who plays the *Creation* this year?" his father was asking.

"The Plasterers," replied Master Brigg.

"And *Adam and Eve*?"

"That I forget. But the Glovers have charge of *Cain and Abel*, and the Shipwrights this year are giving *The Building of the Ark*."

"A good thought! 'Tis the best play for shipwrights!" declared the farmer, laughing. "I'll be bound they'll see it built well and truly. What of *The Shepherds' Play*?"

"The Chandlers have the care of that, and the Goldsmiths of *The Coming of the Three Kings to Herod*."

"That's the man I told you about," cried Colin. "The man that stamped, and talked loud, and had a sword."

"Oh, look!" interrupted Margery, excitedly. "We are coming quite close! We shall soon be there!" And indeed, while they talked, the little company had drawn near to the city, whose walls and frowning gates rose up before them. In a very few minutes they had clattered under the archway of Petergate, and the children found themselves in the city.

III

THE CREATION OF THE ANGELS, AND THE
FALL OF LUCIFER

MARGERY, who had never been to any big town before, looked about her with delight and amazement as they rode towards the inn where Dobbin and Jock were to be left in the stables till the evening. The narrow streets were paved with cobble-stones, and lined with houses which compared with the little cottage at home, seemed to her marvellously grand and imposing. They were built of plaster and timber, with gables curiously carved, and as in many of them each story projected beyond the lower one, the top windows on either side of the streets were close together, so that opposite neighbours were near enough to shake hands. There was such a crowd that the horses had to walk very slowly, pushing their way amongst the people. Early as it still was, the whole city seemed to be awake and astir, and the noise was deafening. Carts clattered over the rough stones, their drivers shouting to the throng to make way. Boys whistled and screamed, whips cracked ; mothers called to their children to

keep close, and the whole crowd seemed to be moving in one direction.

"They are going to Mikelgate ; that's where the first play begins," called Colin, looking back over his shoulder. "Oh, father, make haste ! We shall be late."

"Plenty o' time ! plenty o' time !" declared Farmer Short. "Here we turn in, at the sign of the 'Dragon.' Pull Jock's head round, mother !"

They had now reached an archway, and following a procession of other horses and carts, they soon found themselves in the big courtyard of the inn, which had a wooden gallery upon which the living-rooms of the the first floor opened, running along three sides of it. Above the gallery there was another story, surmounted by gabled roofs, with carvings upon them of curious birds and beasts and hobgoblins. The blue sky formed the ceiling over the courtyard.

A stableman ran to lift Margery from Dobbin's back, and then to help Mistress Short to dismount. Colin had slipped from the saddle by himself, and his father following him, went to see that the horses were as comfortably lodged as possible, for there were so many others that there was scarcely room for them all in the stables.

The children waited impatiently till he reappeared, for they were to go on foot to the house of Mistress Harpham, near Mikelgate.

"We shall be late ! I know we shall be late !"

Margery kept repeating till her mother bade her be quiet.

"It will take at least an hour for the first play to reach the house of your Aunt Harpham," she assured her. "It has but just begun at Mikelgate."

But Margery was not happy till, having pushed their way out of the throng in the courtyard, they found themselves on the way to their kinswoman's dwelling.

Master Harpham's house appeared very grand to the children. It had a big carved doorway leading to the shop, and the rooms above seemed to them magnificently furnished, with their big oak chests, and their high-backed chairs with leather seats, and the ornamented beams across the ceiling. Mistress Harpham, a stout, rosy-faced dame, greeted them very kindly, and called to her son to come and be introduced to his little cousins.

"Giles is going to act!" she told them proudly. "But not yet. His turn comes later. He is to be Isaac in the play of *Abraham's Sacrifice*."

Colin and Margery looked with awe and amazement upon their cousin. He was a pretty boy of twelve, with fair hair hanging to his shoulders, and a pale, delicate little face.

"Won't you be frightened?" whispered Margery, gazing at him with breathless interest.

"No; not very," he said, laughing. "I have been in the plays before. Last year I was an angel."

"Take them to the window, Giles!" called his mother. "It's time we were in our seats. Little ones in the front; grown-ups at the back!"

The room was by this time full of townsfolk, invited by the glover and his wife, and the first-floor windows, as well as the upper ones, were crowded with people in holiday dresses; the women in snowy wimples, and gowns of many colours; the men in tunics of russet brown or dull green.

Colin, Margery, and Giles sat on stools close to the window, and the country children looked with interest at the scene before them. The glover's house was at the corner of the market-place, and the windows of all the houses surrounding it were hung with gay cloths, and packed from basement to roof with people.

Below, in the cobble-paved square, with a babel of noise and confusion, the poorer folk crowded.

"There won't be any room when the play *does* come!" exclaimed Colin.

"The heralds will clear the way," said Giles. "Last night it was such fun to watch them! They rode through all the town reading the proclamation. That's a warning, you know, for every one to behave properly to-day."

"Oh, what did they say?" asked Margery, with interest.

"Well, they came to the market-place here, on horseback, with trumpets, and one man shouted at the top of his voice. Let me see. What did he say?"

I believe I can remember some of it. It was like this. . . . Oyez. *We command, on the King's behalf, and the Mayor and the Sheriffs of this city, that no man go armed in this city with swords nor Carlisle axes, nor none other defences in disturbance of the King's peace and the play, or hindering of the procession of Corpus Christi, and that they leave their harness in their inns. . . .* I forget the words that came next, but they meant that each guild was to act its play in proper order. And that all manner of craftsmen who were responsible for a play should employ 'good players well-arranged and openly speaking' upon pain of a fine. And all that sort of thing, you know."

"I can't think how you can remember it!" said Margery."

"Oh, when you act, you have a great deal to learn by heart, so you *must* have a good memory," returned Giles, airily.

"Oh, look! look!" interrupted Colin. "Here they come! These are the heralds, aren't they?"

There was a stir and a swaying in the crowd, and all the people at the windows began to crane their necks to see three or four horsemen, who came riding down a narrow side-alley into the market-place, scattering the throng, which pressed back before them. Then a silence fell.

"Oh, how beautiful they look!" Margery whispered. And indeed in their tunics of blue and crimson, embroidered with gold, their horses also decked in gay

velvet trappings, the heralds, with their silver trumpets, were quite magnificent.

One of them, after a long blast on his trumpet, had by this time begun to announce the plays.

"Reverend lords and ladies all,
That at this time here assembled be,"

he chanted, and then went on to mention the subject of each play, and the special guild by which it was to be acted.

The children exchanged delighted glances when the Parchment-makers' and Bookbinders' Guild came in its place on the list, for in that play, "Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac on an altar," they were, of course, specially interested.

At last, with another blast from the trumpets, the heralds clattered away.

"The first pageant will be here in a minute," said Giles. "It must be nearly over at Mikelgate by this time. The heralds were late."

"What are all those flags for?" asked Colin. He was looking down into the market-place, where a great square was marked out by gay banners stuck at intervals into the ground between the cobble-stones. Each banner had the arms of the city painted upon it, and all the flags fluttered bravely in the wind.

"They're to mark the place where the pageant is to stand," said Giles. "It's arranged like that all over the town. Wherever a platform is to be placed, the banners are put to show the exact position."

"Is Giles telling you all about it?" asked Master Harpham, leaning over the shoulders of his friends at the window to pat Margery's head. "Aye! aye! You ask him anything you want to know, and I'll warrant he'll have an answer ready. A fine fellow at the pageants is Giles! The Town Council chose him out of a score of others to play Isaac. Aye, that they did!" he added proudly, turning to the women who crowded behind the children.

Margery looked up shyly at the big man, whom they had not seen before. He had just come up from his shop in the basement to bring the news that the first platform, or *pageant*, as every one called it, was on its way; and now he was passing from group to group at the windows, greeting his acquaintances in a loud, hearty voice, and inquiring whether every one could see.

"Did you have to practise a long time for Isaac?" asked Margery, who could not get over her awe at the knowledge that Giles was one of the players.

"Oh, not so very long. We had about six rehearsals at the Town Hall. But some of the people *were* such a long time learning their parts!" said Giles, sighing.

"It's coming! it's coming!" cried Colin; and every one turned eagerly to the window.

Down below in the square there was a swaying amongst the crowd, and a great murmur of expectation as at the corner of the market-place, a huge object

came into view, towering high above the heads of the people. It was preceded by a body of young men, who pressed back the crowd with clubs or with the flat sides of their swords, so as to clear the space marked out by the banners.

"Who are all these people with clubs and swords?" inquired Colin excitedly, while Margery's eyes were fixed on the swaying blue canvas that was approaching.

"They are the apprentices of the guild—the Tanners' Guild, you know"—Giles explained. "The apprentices of each guild have to keep the crowd in order, and some of them have to drag the pageant along. Here they come! That's Master Smith pulling in front. We know him well. And there's Robin Coke next to him!"

The throng in the market-place was now well enough ordered for the pageant to be clearly visible, and the children saw a big wooden stage of two platforms, one above the other.

It ran upon huge wheels, and in front there were ropes, which were passed round the waists of eight or ten men, who were pulling with all their might.

On it came, jolting over the cobble-stones of the market-square till the men ceased to pull, and the double platform stopped just in front of the window at which the children sat.

The upper stage was just on a level with their eyes, and Margery clasped her hands in delight.

"We've got the best place of all!" she whispered to her brother.

As yet the curtains of the upper platform were close drawn, and she had time to look at the whole car before the play actually began.

The lower half, she noticed, was all covered in by brightly-coloured painted cloths, so that nothing of the interior could be seen.

"That's where the players dress," Giles told her. "And there are trap-doors and steps leading from it to the upper part, which is the stage, you know. And ——."

But the curtains were now pulled aside, disclosing what seemed to the children a grand and beautiful scene. A canopy, painted deep blue to represent the sky, stretched above the head of an imposing figure seated upon a gilt throne.

Those of you who have seen pictures of popes, can imagine the dress of the player who represented Almighty God. He wore a mitre upon his head, over hair that was made stiff with gold. His beard was also of stiff gold, and his robes were magnificently embroidered and clasped with jewels. In his hand he held a jewelled sceptre. The floor at his feet was strewn with rushes, and at first there was nothing on the stage but this stately figure, over-arched by the blue sky.

Then he spoke, chanting in a grave full voice, so that the sound of it reached over the market-place; and these were his words, put into the kind of English

we speak to-day. Below on this page you will find them as they were then written.¹

“I am gracious and great, God without beginning;
 I am maker unmade, all might is in me;
 I am life and way unto salvation winning;
 I am foremost and first; as I bid shall it be.
 My blessing of face shall be blinding,
 And descending from harm to be hiding,
 My body in bliss ever abiding,
 Unending without any ending.”

Then, with other grave words, the LORD began the work of Creation. First He brought into existence the angels, summoning them in nine orders of rank and power, each order greater and more powerful than the last. One after another they appeared from a platform at the back of the stage, wearing coats of gilded skin, over which long robes hung to their feet. Golden wings were fastened to their shoulders, and on their foreheads diadems sparkled.

Then, greatest of all, and more beautiful and resplendent than the rest, came Lucifer.

On him the Almighty conferred dignity and honour above all the other spirits He had created. He was

¹ “I am gracyus and grete, God without you begynning;
 I am maker unmade, all mighte es in me;
 I am lyfe and way unto welth wynnyn;
 I am foremaste and fyrste, als I bid sall it be.
 My blyssing of ble sall be blending,
 And held and fro harme to be hydande,
 My body in blys ay abydande,
 Une dande withouten any endyng.”

the Star of the Morning, the great and splendid arch-angel.

But Lucifer, filled with pride, soon began to contend before God. He claimed still higher powers than those which had been granted him, trying to make himself the equal of the Almighty.

Then at last God spoke his sentence of banishment, and he and the angels who worshipped him, were cast down from heaven.

"O *Lucifer, Star of the Morning, how art thou fallen!*" is a beautiful line in the Bible, which alludes to the disgrace and banishment which the audience now saw acted before their eyes.

Shortly after the fall of Lucifer, the curtains of the pageant closed upon the scene of God enthroned, surrounded by the good angels singing their praises to the one and only deity.

Margery, who had looked and listened in amazed delight, drew a long breath when this first play was over. Colin, no less excited, began at once to talk and to ask questions.

"Look! they are dragging the stage away!" he exclaimed, "There's the man you called Robin Coke, and there's Master Smith, pulling with all his might. Where are they going to take it now?"

"In front of John Gyseburn's door; that's where it's played next," said Giles. "That's his son, Matthew Gyseburn, the lawyer," he added, pointing out a man who stood at the other window.

"See!" called Margery. "Here comes another pageant. What is this, Giles?"

"Still the *Creation*. The earth is made now, and the birds and fishes and all the animals. This is the Plasterers' pageant. Yesterday John Wiseman showed me all the pigeons he had got for it."

"Pigeons?" echoed Colin.

"You'll see," said Giles, nodding. "I wonder whether I ought to go?" he added, looking back anxiously at his mother. "They'll be doing the third play now at Mikelgate, as the second one has just reached us."

"Plenty of time," declared Mistress Harpham, reassuringly. "You needn't go for another hour yet, my boy."

Meanwhile Colin and Margery were already absorbed in the second pageant, which, drawn as before by men (this time by the Plasterers' apprentices), had stopped in the same place just beneath the window.

IV

THE MAKING OF SUN, MOON, AND STARS :
OF BIRDS, BEASTS, AND FISHES : OF MAN
AND WOMAN. THE GARDEN OF EDEN

WHEN the curtains were drawn aside, another figure, representing God Almighty, was seen seated on a golden throne. When He spoke, it was to bid the earth take shape ; and as He uttered commands, various painted cloths were unrolled, falling one over the other to form a background to His throne.

First, He commanded the light to be divided from the darkness.

At the word, a curtain, half of which was black, the other half white, fell from the canopy overhead down to the rush-strewn floor.

When He bade two great lights appear, " the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night," when " He made the stars also," a painted sky was unrolled with the sun, the moon, and the stars upon it, and a picture of the sea, with fish swimming

in it, followed the words, "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life."

"Now the birds are coming!" whispered Giles, just before the command that fowl should "fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven."

Almost as he spoke, a flight of pigeons rose into the air, first fluttering a moment above the pageant, then wheeling off in many directions, while the crowd watched them open-mouthed.

"John Wiseman had them ready in a basket!" Giles eagerly explained. "He is standing on the platform at the back of the stage, behind the sky, you know; and he let them out just at the right moment, didn't he? There ought to have been a lot of other birds, but they are difficult to get. You see what the direction says?"—he pointed to a page in a parchment-covered book which he held, but Colin and Margery shook their heads and looked with respect at their cousin, who could actually read! They remembered that Giles was said to be a great scholar, and was probably going to be a priest when he grew up. That, of course, accounted for his learning.

"I'll read it to you," said the boy, remembering that his cousins knew nothing of books. "The words of the pageant are here, and all the stage directions, just as Robert Crowe, who wrote out the play for the Plasterers, has copied them. This is what it says about the birds—*Then one ought in secret to put little birds flying in the air and alighting upon the*

earth with the most foreign birds that one is able to procure."

"That's all very well," remarked Giles, closing the book; "but it's difficult. So they had to make pigeons do."

"But they were so pretty!" Margery said. She did not mind talking for a little while now, for there were no more painted scenes to look at, and she scarcely understood the speech which followed the command for "cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth" to come into existence.

In a moment however, her attention was again arrested, for the curtains were drawn, the pageant was pulled away, and, before it had disappeared, a new one, the third, had come into sight.

"This is the *Cardmakers'* play," said Giles, consulting his pageant book. "It is about GOD the FATHER creating Adam and Eve."

"Cardmakers?" Margery asked, rather puzzled at the name. As a country child she did not know all the trades of the town guilds.

"They are the people who make the cards for the wool to be combed on, before it is made up into stuffs, you know," Giles told her.

"Then comes the *Fullers'* play," he went on, reading from the book, "God forbidding Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of Life. Afterwards the *Coopers* do Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; and the serpent deceiving them with apples; and God speaking to

them and cursing the serpent, and with a sword driving them out of Paradise."

"Come, children ! you must be hungry !" called Mistress Harpham at this moment. "Come and have something to eat."

Margery turned reluctantly from the window, where, on the scaffolding, the third play was just beginning ; and her aunt laughed.

"Bless the child ! You can't sit looking at the pageants all day without food !" she exclaimed. "There are plenty more of 'em in all conscience. Come along now. Giles will have to go when he's eaten something. He must soon be starting for his play."

By this time all of the guests were seated at trestle-tables, which had been placed at the back of the room and spread with all sorts of food. There were huge joints, and fat capons, and plenty of ale, to which the guests did ample justice.

Colin and Margery, with Giles between them, were squeezed in at one of the tables, and soon discovered that they were very hungry. There was a great clattering of plates and knives, and a babel of conversation. The pageants already seen, were criticized, praised, or condemned, and compared with those of the preceding year ; and all the guests politely declared how they were looking forward to the play of the Parchment-makers and Bookbinders, the guild to which their host belonged.

"How is it that Giles is allowed to be here, and not

with his company?" inquired the grave but kind-looking man whom Giles had pointed out as Matthew Gyseburn, the lawyer.

"The council gave him special permission to stay at home till the fifth pageant was on its way," explained his mother. "My husband is an important man on the Town Council, as you know," she added proudly. "And you see, Giles isn't a *paid* player! He acts for the love of it—bless him. And he's none too strong," she added, lowering her voice. "Those hours of waiting would make him ill. But as soon as ever this Coopers' pageant moves off, his father will take him to join his company and help him to dress."

"Are you going?" asked Margery sadly, as Giles got up from the table. "I'm so sorry. There won't be any one to tell us all about it now, and I shan't understand!"

"You shall sit by me, little mistress and master," said the good-natured lawyer, smiling. "I'll do my best to make up for Giles. Here, boy! leave me the "pageant-book," in case I'm asked more questions than I know how to answer."

Giles gave him the book, and, then anxiously pulling his father by the arm, forced him to get up.

"So afraid he'll be late!" cried Master Harpham, laughing. "There's heaps of time; but perhaps we'd better be starting."

"Will you ever get through the crowd?" asked a woman anxiously.

"Oh, we know all the backways ; don't we, Giles ? We shall slip along the side-alleys in no time, up to where his pageant is waiting. See you again, neighbours !" He nodded to the company, and, pushing Giles before him, went out.

"May we go to the window now ?" begged Margery, who could hear the players talking, and was longing not to miss too many of the plays.

"To be sure, my dears, if you have had enough to eat," said Mistress Harpham.

The children ran to their places, and found the Coopers' play going on.

This pageant, they noticed, had *three* rooms or stages one beneath the other. On the highest, or Heaven stage, sat God Almighty ; beneath it, in the Garden of Eden, were Adam and Eve ; and the third, still lower stage, represented Earth.

But the children's attention was riveted on the second stage, round which branches of trees and flowers were placed to represent a garden. In the midst was the Tree of Life, with golden fruit upon it, and in the shadow of the tree there was a strange group. Adam and Eve, both of whom were played by tall boys dressed in close-fitting skins dyed flesh-colour, were talking to a huge serpent who, coiled round the trunk of the tree, was tempting them.

"There must be some one speaking inside him," exclaimed Margery. "He's big enough to hide a boy at least—isn't he ?

"Hush!" said Colin; "listen to what he's saying."

The serpent's great head was turned towards Eve, and his voice was full of persuasion. "Ye shall not surely die!" he told her; "for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

Then Eve looked longingly at the golden fruit, and hesitated.

"She's going to pick it!" whispered Margery.

"Yes! look! She has broken off a branch, and she's giving the fruit to Adam. Now she's talking to him."

"And now they're eating the apples!" cried Colin; "and God will be angry! They know He will be angry. See, they're hiding themselves. They can hear His voice!"

And presently, while they watched, God Almighty came down the steps which led from Heaven to Paradise, and entered the garden. Here he questioned Adam and Eve, and afterwards turned to the serpent and cursed him. Then, holding a flashing sword above the heads of the guilty man and woman, He told them of their punishment; and finally drove them weeping from the garden, down to the earth, upon which they were henceforth to live.

The Armourers' pageant was by this time waiting its turn at the corner of the market-place, and when the Coopers' scaffold was dragged away it speedily took its place.

"Now we shall see Adam and Eve's life on the earth," said the lawyer, who had come to the window, and was standing just behind the children.

The curtains before the stage were drawn back, and Adam and Eve, no longer happy and light-hearted, were seen on the earth, where henceforth they had to work in sorrow and suffering. As they sadly talked together, an angel with golden wings appeared to them. To Adam he gave a spade, bidding him till the ground, and to Eve a distaff, commanding her to work for her household.

The Glovers' play came next. The characters in it were Cain and Abel, and the story told of the murder of Abel by Cain, and of Cain's punishment.

It was all very interesting to the children, but they were looking forward so eagerly to the following pageant that they could not refrain from glancing every now and again towards the corner of the market-place at which it would appear.

Noah's ark was the subject, and the lawyer, Master Gyseburn, had told them it would be an amusing play.

It did not seem strange to any of the people assembled that a few of the plays should be written on purpose to make the audience laugh. It had long been the custom to make into comic scenes one or two of the Bible stories in which no sacred characters appeared. The monks who wrote the plays remembered how long and how patiently the crowd had to

stand, and they thought that if the people sometimes laughed, their attention would be kept fresh for the more serious part of the Bible teaching.

So Colin and Margery heard without surprise and with joyful anticipation that Noah's wife would be very funny. They were exceedingly anxious also to see the ark, which Master Gyseburn described as a wonderful piece of work.

There was altogether a good deal of excitement about the two following plays, and much conversation concerning them went on amongst the guests assembled at Master Harpham's.

"They are not our plays—the York plays—at all, are they?" asked a pretty young girl who sat near Margery.

"No," returned a neighbour; "I hear they are both borrowed from Chester, because they are better than our own pageants."

"'Tis very fitting that Noah's ark should be performed by the Shipwrights and Mariners!" said Master Gyseburn. "If they don't understand sea-faring business, who should?"

"Here it comes!" shouted Colin, and every one gazed eagerly at the approaching pageant, which was drawn by the Shipwrights' apprentices.

V

NOAH'S ARK

It paused, as usual, just beneath Master Harpham's window.

"Why, there's no ark!" exclaimed Margery, in a disappointed tone.

"Wait a bit!" Colin warned her. "It's behind those curtains at the back, I expect. Noah has first to be told to build it, you see."

Colin was right, for the play began with God's announcement to Noah that the Deluge was approaching, and His command that a ship should be built.

Then Noah, a venerable old man with a long white beard, praised God for the warning, and spoke as follows :

"O LORDE, I thank Thee lowde and still,
That to me arte in suche will,
And spares me and my howse to spill,
As I now southly [truly] fynde.
Thy byddinge, LORDE, I shall fulfill,
And never more Thee greve nor grill [provoke]
That such grace hath sent me till,
Amongst all mankinde."

Noah's sons and their wives now entered, and the old man turned to them and told them of the flood that was coming :

“Have done, you men and women all,
Hye you, lest this watter fall
To worche [work] this shippe chamber and hall
As God hath bidden us doe,”

he said.

For the first time now, Noah's wife came in, and her appearance was greeted by a roar of laughter from the crowd in the market-place and at the windows. The people understood that she was meant to be a very bad-tempered lady, and both her dress and her face were meant to make them laugh. The part was of course acted by a man (no woman ever acted in those days), and the player was a good actor whom every one knew.

At first the wife did not speak, though all the time her behaviour was amusing. Meanwhile the sons declared themselves ready to help with the ark.

“Father” (said Shem), “I am already bowne [prepared],
An axe I have, by my croune !
As sharp as any in all this toun
For to go thereto.”

Then Ham spoke :

“I have a hatchet, wonder keen
To bite well, as may be seen,
A better ground one, as I ween,
Is not in all this toun.”

Japhet also intended to do his best :

“And I can well make a pin,
And with this hammer knock it in,
Go and work without more din,
And I am ready bowne [prepared].”

But Noah's wife at once showed by her grumbling speech that she was obstinate, and did not intend to do much work :

“And we shall bring timber too,
For women nothing else to do ;
Women be weak to undergo
Any great travail,”

she declared.

At last, to the children's delight, the curtains at the back of the stage parted, and they saw the ark. It was already very substantially built, for of course in the few minutes at the actors' disposal they could do no more than *pretend* to hammer and plane and saw. Indeed all the time that it was not in use, this ark hung in one of the churches in York, slung to the beams across the nave, from which place of safety it was every year taken down to do duty in the pageant.

Margery and Colin gazed with admiration upon the big ship, which was very much like the Noah's arks we see nowadays in the toy-shops, only of course enormously larger. It was roofed in at the top, and gaily painted. There were little windows along the sides that opened and showed glimpses of rooms within. A mast with sails and rigging appeared above

the roof, and altogether a more satisfactory and interesting ark can scarcely be imagined.

Noah and his sons began at once to work very busily, as though they were really building, Noah in these words explaining all there was to do :

“Now in the Name of God I will begin
To make the ship that we shall in,
That we be ready for to swim
At the coming of the flood.
These boards I join together,
To keep us safe from the weather,
That we may roam both hither and thither,
And safe be from this flood.
Of this tree will I have the mast,
Tied with cables that will last.
With a sail-yard for each blast,
And each thing in its kind.
With topmast high and bowsprit,
With cords and ropes I hold all fit
To sail forth at the next weete [tide]
This ship is at an end.”

The ark, now finished by the pretended labours of the men, Noah turned to his wife and family.

“Wife” (he said), “in this castle we shall be kept ;
My children and thou I would in leaped.”

But Noah's wife immediately began to show her temper. She had been looking all the time with scorn upon the building of the ship, and laughing with her neighbours, or “gossips,” as she called them, to see her husband and her sons working, as she considered, so foolishly ; and when Noah begged her

to come into safety, this was her contemptuous answer :

“ In faith, Noe, I had as lief thou had slept,
For all thy frankishfare [nonsense],
For I will not do after thy rede [advice].”

“ Good wife, do as I thee bid,”

said Noah, coaxingly.

“ By CHRIST not, or I see more need,
Though thou stand all the day and rave,”

she replied, while the crowd broke into roars of laughter to see the husband and wife quarrelling.

“ LORD, that women be crabbed ay !”

exclaimed Noah, amid fresh laughter,

“ And never are meek, that I dare say.
This is well seen of me to-day,
In witness of you each one.
Good wife, let all this beere [noise]
That thou makest in this place here ;
For they all ween thou art master,
And so thou art, by St. John !”

But here, in order to attend to the various animals which had to be taken into the ark, Noah was obliged to cease arguing for a time ; and the way in which this difficult business of the animals was represented, greatly amused and interested the children.

Each of Noah's sons and daughters-in-law mentioned the names of many birds and beasts, and as they named them, they held up great figures painted on parchment, and cut out to represent the various creatures of which they spoke.

Shem began the list :

“Sir, here are lions, leopards in,
Horses, mares, oxen, and swine,
Goats, calves, sheep, and kine
Here sitten [settled] may you see.”

“Oh, look at the lion !” exclaimed *Margery*.
“Isn’t he beautiful ? And the pig, *Colin* ! Did you
ever see such a fat pig in your life ?”

Ham had now begun to show the animals in his
charge :

“Camels, asses, men may find ;
Buck, doe, hart, and hind,”

he chanted, holding up the figure of each beast before
putting it in the ark.

“Take here cats and dogs too (said *Japhet*),
Otter, fox, fulmart also ;
Hares hopping gaily, can ye
Have kail here for to eat.”

Presently also *Noah*’s wife, very scornfully laughing,
showed *her* animals :

“And here are bears, wolves set,
Apes, owls, marmoset ;
Weasels, squirrels, and ferret,
Here they eat their meat,”

she said.

Shem’s wife then went on with the list of creatures,
first exclaiming at their number :

“Yet more beasts are in this house !
Here cats come in full crowse [comfort],
Here a rat and here a mouse,
They stand nigh together.

Margery wondered how the cats would get on with the rats and mice, but Shem's wife offered no explanation, and immediately after her followed the wife of Ham :

“And here are fowls, less and more (she declared),
Hérons, cranes, and bittern ;
Swans, peacocks, have them before ! [in front]
Meat for this weather.”

“Here are cocks, kites, crows (said Japhet's wife),
Rooks, ravens, many rows ;
Cuckoos, curlews, whoso knows,
Each one in his kind.
And here are doves, ducks, drakes,
Redshanks, running through the lakes—
And each fowl that language makes
In this ship men may find.”

At length, after the animals had all gone safely into the ark, Noah, to the huge delight of the crowd, turned again to his wife, and once more began to urge her to enter.

“Wife, come in, why standest thou there ? (he entreated).
Thou art ever forward, that I dare swear ;
Come on God's half [behalf], time it were,
For fear lest that we drown.”

But the foolish woman could not be persuaded. Nothing would induce her to enter the ark, she declared, unless her “gossips” were allowed to come too ; and that, as we know from the story of the Flood, was forbidden, since only Noah and his family were allowed to embark.

"Yes, sir ; set up your sail (said she),
And row forth with evil heale,
For without any fail
I will not out of this town ;
But I have my gossips every one,
One foot further I will not go.
They shall not drown, by S. John !
If I may save their life.
They loved me full well, by CHRIST !
But thou wilt let them in thy chest,
Else row forth, Noah, whither thou list,
And get thee a new wife."

"It's rather nice of her to want to save her friends, though—isn't it?" exclaimed Margery, who was breathlessly interested.

"I don't believe she cares a bit about them, really," said Colin. "She only wants to be obstinate, and to make a fuss."

"Now what are they doing? Will she be left behind?" asked Margery, anxiously.

"No," said Master Gyseburn. "You see, Noah is sending his sons to make her go in. Listen to what Japhet says. He is just going to speak to her."

"Mother (begged Japhet), we pray you altogether,
For we are here, your children ;
Come into the ship for fear of the weather."

"She won't go ! she won't go !" cried Margery.

"Noah's sending Shem to her again ! There ! he's lifted her right in !" Colin exclaimed. "Oh, isn't she angry !"

The people all round were laughing so much by

this time, that the children could only just hear Shem's words as he carried his mother up the plank into the ark :

“ In faith, mother, yet you shall,
Whether you will or not ! ”

“ Welcome, wife, into this boat ! ” (cried Noah.)

“ And have, then, that for thy note ! ” [trouble]

she returned, boxing her husband's ears.

At this outbreak the crowd again shouted with laughter, and went on laughing still more when Noah put his hands to his ears, moaning and complaining. By degrees, however, as the flood was supposed to rise higher and higher, he and his wife were quieted.

“ Over the land the water spreads ! (Noah explained.)
Now all this world is in a flood,
As I see well in sight,
This window will I close anon,
And into my chamber will I gone.”

The children eagerly watched him as, one after one, he closed the windows of the ark, shutting in all the little company of people and all the beasts and birds that were to be saved.

“ Now you must imagine that the ark is floating on the water ! ” said Master Gyseburn, smiling at Colin and Margery, who found no difficulty at all in doing so. “ The windows will be shut for a little while, and we have to pretend that forty days have passed before Noah opens them again. Soon we shall hear him singing, and then we shall see him once more.”

In a few moments, indeed, voices were heard within the ark, upraised in a psalm of praise ; and when it was ended the windows were slowly slipped back, and at one of them stood Noah, a leaden weight fastened to a long cord in his hand.

"What's that for?" asked Colin. "What is he going to do?"

"Ah! he's going to 'cast the lead' in proper fashion, just as sailors do when they want to find out how deep the sea is," explained Master Gyseburn. "Don't forget that this is the Shipwrights' pageant, and they are learned in all seafaring business, as you may imagine."

"Yes! he's unwinding the line!" cried Colin; and I suppose he finds that the water has gone down? He can see the tops of the mountains now—can't he?"

"The *whole* of the mountains, I should think!" returned Master Gyseburn, laughing. "Listen! he's going to speak."

"Now forty days are fully gone (Noah began),
Send a raven I will anon;
If aught were earth, tree, or stone,
Be dry in any place.
And, if this fowl come not again,
It is a sign, sooth to say,
That dry it is, on hill and plain,
And God hath done some grace."

"Oh! he's going to let out a *real* raven!" said Margery joyfully. "What a big black thing! Look, how he's clapping his wings!"

"There!—now he's flown!" exclaimed Colin.
"He's gone right over the roofs of those houses opposite. See how the people are staring after him. *He'll* never come back again!"

"But the dove will!" declared Margery excitedly.
"Noah's going to let a dove fly now. He's talking to him—see!"

"Thou wilt turn again to me,
For of all fowls that may fly
Thou art most meek and hend [kind],"

said Noah, as he threw the bird up into the air.

"It won't be the *same* bird that comes back—will it?" asked Colin, looking up at Master Gyseburn, who smiled again.

"No—there's another dove already fastened with a cord from the top of the stage. We shall see it in a minute!" And, sure enough, while he was speaking, the bird came fluttering down, almost into Noah's hands.

"Oh! it's got the olive-branch in its beak!" exclaimed Margery. "That shows that the trees are out of the water—doesn't it?"

"Yes; listen—then you will hear Noah saying that the flood has gone down.

"By this sight I well may say,
This flood begins to cease (Noah was declaring).
My sweet dove to me brought has
A branch of olive from some place;
This betokeneth God has done us some grace,
And is a sign of peace."

By this time all the windows in the ark were open, disclosing the whole family, including Noah's wife, who looked much subdued.

"She's glad she's saved now!" Margery remarked. "Look!—they're all coming out, and God is talking to them."

"He is promising that the rainbow shall be a sign from heaven that the earth shall never more be drowned," said Master Gyseburn. "It's all over now. Look!—the men are dragging the pageant away to the next halting-place."

"And *now* it's Abraham and Isaac!" said Margery joyfully.



VI

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM AND OF ISAAC

BOTH the children looked anxiously in the direction from which all the pageants coming from the gates of the Priory, approached the market-place.

"It isn't in sight yet!" said Colin in surprise, for hitherto one pageant had followed swiftly upon another.

"Oh! but here's a man on horseback, dressed *splendidly*!" Margery cried. "What is he going to do?"

"He's part of the play," Master Gyseburn explained. "He is a messenger who is going to tell us what it's all about."

By this time the rider, who came from a side-street, was clattering over the stones of the market-place. Just beneath the window he drew up his horse, and, raising his plumed cap, began in these words to address the multitude :

"All peace, Lordings, that be present,
And hearken now with good intent
How Noah away from us he went
With all his company ;

And Abraham, through God's grace
He is come forth into this place,
And you will give him room and space
To tell you his storye.
This play, forsooth, begin shall he,
In worship of the Trinity,
That you may all hear and see
What shall be done to-day.
My name is Gobbet-on-the-Green,
No longer here I may be seen ;
Farewell, my Lordings, all by dene [in haste]
For letting [hindering] of your play."

Setting spurs to his horse, the messenger, a brilliant figure in a doublet of sapphire blue laced with gold, and long crimson hose, rode away, disappearing at the opposite corner of the market-place from that at which he had entered.

And now another figure came into view, also riding.

This was a stately man in long robes, wearing a curious turban of linen.

"Is that Abraham?" asked Colin. "But where is Isaac?"

"He doesn't come yet," answered Master Gyseburn. "The story, you see, begins long before Isaac is born. Abraham has just returned from his victory over the four kings. Listen! He is explaining how the kings took his nephew Lot prisoner, and how he released him, and conquered the kings."

"Now there's another man coming on horseback!" said Margery. "Oh! look how beautifully he is

dressed, with rubies on his gown, and on the thing that comes over his forehead. Who is he?"

"That's Melchizedek, King of Salem, and priest of the Most High God. He is coming to bless Abraham for conquering the kings, and to give him bread and wine."

"Yes! A servant is holding up a golden cup to him and a golden plate!" said Colin. "And now he's going to give the bread and wine to Abraham, I suppose."

This duly happened as Colin had guessed, for Melchizedek, reining up his horse close to Abraham, began to speak, offering him presently the golden cup and platter:

"Abraham, welcome must thou be,
God's grace is fully in thee;
Blessed ever must thou be
That enemies so can make.
I have brought, as thou may'st see,
Bread and wine for thy degree;
Receive this present now from me,
And that I thee beseke [beseech]."

Then Abraham, taking the bread and wine, answered in this fashion:

"Sir King, welcome in good say,
Thy present is welcome to my pay.
God has helped me to-day,
Unworthy though I were.
He shall have part of my prey
That I won since I went away.
Therefore to thee thou take it may,
The tenth I offer thee."

At this moment a horse richly laden with all sorts of precious gifts of gold and silver and jewels was led forward by a page. The beautiful animal had splendid harness and trappings upon him, and he walked proudly as though conscious of the royal presents he brought.

Melchizedek accepted the gift and, after further talk with Abraham, rode away, followed by his servants, who led the laden steed.

Abraham now wheeled his horse aside to make room for the messenger, who rode into the cleared space, and once more addressed the audience. In a long speech he explained to the people that the scene they had just witnessed was a sort of parable, and meant the Holy Communion, the Bread and Wine commemorating CHRIST's sacrifice for the world.

So far the pageant or wooden stage had not been used at all. All the characters had come riding in to act their parts. But now the platform which stood waiting in the background, was drawn into the midst of the open space, and the rest of the play took place as usual, upon it.

First God the FATHER appeared, and Abraham entreated Him to send him a child to be his heir. The Almighty promised to grant his request, laid various commands upon him, and told him that his descendants should be as the stars of heaven for number ; and the scene ended with Abraham kneeling to bless and thank the LORD for His mercy.

The curtains were now drawn, and before they were once more unclosed, the messenger again rode up, and explained to the people how some of the commands which God had just given to Abraham pointed to and foreshadowed the Sacrament of Baptism, which followed the birth of CHRIST.

When he had ridden away, and the curtains of the pageant again swung back, the children grew very excited, for almost the first words of the scene told them that Isaac might soon be expected to appear.

"You see," said Master Gyseburn, "that some years are supposed to have passed between the last scene and this. God's promise has been fulfilled, and Abraham now has a son. Listen !

Abraham was alone on the stage, but just as Master Gyseburn finished speaking, God's voice was heard :

"Abraham, My servant Abraham !"

"Lo, LORD, already here I am,"

replied Abraham.

"Take Isaac thy son by name,"

the voice continued,

"And in sacrifice offer him to Me
Upon that hill, beside thee.
Abraham, I will that it so be
For aught that may befall."

Though almost stunned with grier at the command, Abraham at once declared himself ready to obey the

LORD. He said that all his household should remain at home except Isaac, with whom he would go to the appointed hill.

By this time Mistress Harpham was leaning anxiously over the children's shoulders, for she knew that Giles in the character of Isaac was waiting to come on to the stage. All the guests were also very excited and full of expectation.

"It's well that the boy acts with so good a man as Master Eliott!" exclaimed a woman who stood close to her hostess.

"Aye! John Eliott is a rare good player!" answered Mistress Harpham nervously. "We've never had a better 'Abraham' than he makes, and he's taken such pains with Giles too, teaching him and training him for the part."

"There he is! There he is!" cried Margery, as a pretty, delicate little figure in a linen tunic entered. "Oh! *doesn't* he look nice!"

And indeed, with his fair curly hair and sweet face, Giles made quite a touching little Isaac.

"Hush! Hush! Abraham is speaking," Master Gyseburn reminded her.

"Make thee ready, my darling," he was saying in a voice which made Margery feel as though she wanted to cry :

"Make thee ready, my darling,
For we must do a little thing;
This wood upon thy back you bring,
We must not long abide.

A sword and fire I will take,
For sacrifice I must make ;
God's bidding will I not forsake,
But ay obedient be."

There was a deep silence in the crowd, as speaking
in a very clear, gentle voice, Isaac made reply :

"Father, I am all ready
To do your bidding meekly ;
To bear this wood full bound am I
As you command me."

Abraham then in trembling tone gave a blessing
to his son, whose look of bewilderment and growing
fear brought tears to the eyes of some of the women at
the window.

Then, after the old man had bound the wood on
the boy's back, he was suddenly overcome with misery.

"Oh ! my heart will break in three,
To hear thy words I have pity,"

he exclaimed. But the cry of despair was immediately
followed by

"As thou wilt, LORD, so must it be."

Still wondering and afraid, Isaac spoke :

"Are you anything adread ? (he asked)
Father, if it be your will,
Where is the beast that we shall kill ?"

And when Abraham told him that he saw no animal
at all, the boy went on in a shaking voice :

"Father, I am full sore afraid
To see you bare this naked sword.

I hope for all middle-yard [instead of any
creature from the farmyard],
You will not slay your child?"

Then the father, who could not bear to detect the fear in his boy's voice, tried to comfort him by saying that the LORD would surely provide some beast that might be slain for the sacrifice. But Isaac was not satisfied. He begged the old man to tell him whether any evil would happen to him, and at the entreaty Abraham could no longer hide his terrible grief, but broke into wild words.

"Ah, dear God, that me is woe!
Thou bursts my heart in sunder,"

he exclaimed, wringing his hands; and finally, when Isaac again implored him to hide nothing from him, he told the dreadful truth.

"O Isaac, Isaac, I must thee kill!"
he cried.

Then poor little Isaac went down on his knees and entreated his father to spare him:

"Alas! father," he sobbed, "is that your will,
Your own child here for to spill
Upon this hill's brink?
If I have trespassed in any degree
With a rod you may beat me;
Put up your sword, if your will be,
For I am but a child. . . .
Would God my mother were here with me!
She would kneel upon her knee,
Praying you, father, if it might be,
For to save my life."

By this time Mistress Harpham was crying, and so were many other mothers in the crowd, while they listened to the boy's voice, and the words of Abraham as he explained to his son that this terrible thing must come to pass because it was God's command.

Isaac listened, and, forgetting himself, tried very sweetly to comfort his poor father, begging him not to linger, but to do the deed quickly.

"Father, tell my mother of nothing," he implored, anxious to spare her the knowledge of his fate; and then he asked that a handkerchief might be tied over his eyes to prevent him from seeing the flash of the sword.

Most of the women hid their own eyes while poor little Isaac was bound and laid upon the altar; when the boy spoke again, for the last time, they sobbed aloud.

"Now, father, I see that I shall die!
Almighty God in Majesty,
My soul I offer unto Thee;
LORD, to it be kind."

Margery could not look when Abraham, snatching up the sword, held it high over the child's head, and it was only when she heard a gentle voice that she dared to take her hands from her eyes.

"Abraham, My servant dear!"

"Look up! He's not going to be hurt" whispered Colin. "The angel has come. *Two* angels!"

With great relief Margery gazed at them. They were beautiful, she thought, with their long golden wings, and their white gowns; and she loved them for coming to save poor little Isaac.

She saw that Abraham had dropped his sword, and she heard his trembling voice saying,

"Lo, Lord! I am already here."

*"Lay not thy sword in any manner
On Isaac, thy dear darling!"*

replied one of the gracious angels, while the other pointed to a ram which was struggling in a thicket of bushes close by, and bade Abraham sacrifice the animal instead of his only son.

Then Abraham rejoiced, and offered praise to God:

*"Ah, LORD of heaven, and King of bliss!
Thy bidding I shall do, I wis;
Sacrifice here to me sent is,
And all, LORD, through Thy grace.
A hornèd wether here I see,
Among the briars tied is he.
To Thee offered it shall be
Anon, right in this place."*

Margery drew a long breath when, just before the curtains were closed, she saw Abraham unbinding and embracing his poor little son. But even then the play was not quite over, for again the messenger rode forward, and, placing himself in front of the pageant, explained to the audience that Isaac was a type of CHRIST, and that the sacrifice was meant to foreshadow

His death upon the Cross. These were the words of his message :

“ Lordings, the signification
Of this deed of devotion,
An you will, it is shown,
May turn you to much good.
This deed you see done in this place,
In example of JESUS done it was,
That for to win mankind grace
Was sacrificed on the rood.
By Abraham you may understand
The FATHER of heaven that can fand [find means]
With His SON's blood to break that band
The devil had brought us to.
By Isaac understand I may
JESUS Who was obedient ay,
His FATHER's will to work alway,
His death to undergo.”

VII

THE SHEPHERDS' PLAY

MANY were the exclamations of wonder and delight at the performance, and many the congratulations to the parents of the little actor, when *The Sacrifice of Isaac* passed on its way to the next halting-place. Indeed so excited and talkative were the guests at the house of Master Harpham, that the four following pageants received little attention from them.

"The poor child will be worn out before evening comes!" declared the women again and again, and Giles' mother agreed. "Though he so loves playing," she said, "that I don't think he feels the fatigue as much as one might imagine. I know who *will* be worn out, though!" she exclaimed, turning to Mistress Short. "Your little ones ought to go and rest awhile. It's altogether too long a day for them."

Colin and Margery protested, but their mother was firm, and they were obliged to follow her to Mistress Harpham's guest-room, the grandest they had ever seen, where Margery was placed on the big four-

posted bed of oak, and Colin, grumbling a great deal, was forced to lie down on a little truckle-bed at its foot.

"You'll be all the fresher, and enjoy the plays all the better for a bit of a sleep," Mistress Harpham assured them. "And you shall be called in time for the Shepherds' play—that I promise you."

Margery brightened at this, for she had heard that the Shepherds' play was the most popular of all the pageants, and she had been afraid of missing it. Though she and Colin had laughed at the idea of "a bit of a sleep," each found a strange feeling of drowsiness creeping nearer, and considering that they had been up since daybreak, and it was now past noon, this was not so surprising as they considered it. At any rate, when their mother softly entered the room an hour later, she roused both children from sleep.

The Shepherds' play, she told them, was expected in a few minutes; and they ran eagerly into the front room to take their old places at the window.

"Do tell us what they've been acting!" begged Margery, as their friend Master Gyseburn welcomed them with a smile.

"Well! we've had *Moses lifting up the Serpent in the Wilderness*. That was the Hosiers' pageant. Then came the Grocers with the *Salutation of Mary to Elisabeth*. Next came *Mary and Joseph with an angel commanding them to go to Bethlehem*, acted by the Pewterers; and the last one was the Tylers' (Thatchers') pageant

of the *Stable at Bethlehem, with the Child Jesus in the Manger.*"

"Oh! we wanted to see that!" exclaimed both the children, very disappointed.

"You will," Master Gyseburn assured them. "After this pageant, the Shepherds go to the stable to worship the Child, so the manger scene appears again; in fact it appears several times."

By the stir and noise in the crowd below, it was evident that the Shepherds' play was awaited with great eagerness. There was a pushing and scrambling in the throng, which had greatly increased in numbers. Many people who had strolled away to get something to eat and drink had returned, and were trying to recover their lost places.

"Is this a funny play?" asked Colin.

"Yes," said Master Gyseburn. "The Shepherds' play, or at any rate the first part of it, is always expected to be amusing. It is an old custom, and the people would be very disappointed, and perhaps angry, if it were changed. This particular play is one that is always acted at Wakefield, but our Chandlers have borrowed it this year, because it is such a good one."

"Oh! this is the Chandlers' pageant, then?" asked Margery.

Master Gyseburn nodded. "Here it comes," said he. "You will find that it has very little to do with the Bible story about the Shepherds."

"Just a made-up play, I suppose?" said Colin.

"That's it. Just a funny story to make people laugh."

By this time the pageant stood in its place before the Harphams' window, and the children noticed that the big stage was divided into two parts. One part represented a field, in which three shepherds were seated with their sheep huddled round them; and next to this scene, on a line with it, there was a sort of separate compartment, at present covered by curtains.

The shepherds began at once to grumble about the weather. They complained of the cold, which one of them said made his legs cramped, and his hands all chapped.

Neither Margery nor Colin, nor indeed any of the simple people who watched the play, found anything strange in this. Indeed very few of them realized that all the events they were watching, took place in an Eastern country, whose scenery and climate were very different from anything that was represented by the pageant. They imagined all the scenes as happening in a country very like England—if not in England itself! So the shepherds talked about the "moors," which, as you know, spread through Yorkshire, and of "bannocks," which are special cakes made in the North of England, and of "ale," the usual English drink; and no one criticized nor found fault, because scarcely anybody knew, or remembered,

if they knew, that CHRIST's life was spent in a warm far-away Eastern land, whose manners, customs, and language were as different as possible from those of England.

The shepherds talked about many things familiar in the every-day life of most of the people in the crowd. They grumbled about the taxes they had to pay, and they gossiped about their wives, who they said were always scolding and nagging ; and they complained bitterly about their hard work, and their low wages. And the listening people laughed and were delighted, because all they heard came home to them and was thoroughly well understood.

Presently another shepherd entered, dressed like the rest in a linen smock, though over it he had thrown a heavy cloak. His appearance was hailed by a shout of delight from the audience, for he was a favourite actor, and the part he was going to play was well known.

His name was Mac, and with the shepherds he evidently had the reputation of a thief, for directly he arrived one of them warned the others.

"Is he come?" he asked. "Then each one take heed to his things!" And to make sure of him when they thought of going to sleep, the men forced him to lie down in the midst of them, so that if he stirred they would be warned.

But no sooner did his companions begin to snore than Mac got up, and walking round the men, he

worked a spell upon them to make them sleep heavily, chanting these words :

“Be about you a circle as round as the moon
Till I have done that I will, till that it be noon,
That ye lie stone-still till that I have done.
Over your heads my hand I lift, . . .
Out go your eyes, fore to do your sight. . . .”

Then seeing that they were all motionless, he crept to the flock, and taking a fat sheep, put it under his cloak.

At this moment the curtains in front of the other division of the stage were pulled aside, showing a poor cottage room, in which sat Mac's wife spinning. A little wicket-gate in front of the cottage was locked, and Mac (who was supposed to have walked some distance to his home) began to knock upon it, and to beg his wife to let him in. At first she was angry with him, saying that one day he would be hanged for sheep-stealing. But the first question after all was to decide how they were to hide the sheep during the search which was sure to be made by its owners. And here Mac's wife showed her quick wits, for she suggested a splendid way out of the difficulty. This was to dress the creature up as a baby, and put it in the cradle !

Mac agreed, and there were roars of laughter as the poor struggling sheep was wrapped in flannels and robes, and at last tucked so securely in the cradle that it could not move.

When this was at last accomplished, Mac went back to the field, and lying down quietly in his old place, pretended to be fast asleep. Then one by one the shepherds awoke, and began to tell their dreams. All of them except Mac had dreamt that a sheep had been carried off; and *Mac*, so he said, had dreamt that his wife was very ill. He pretended to be much concerned and, telling the men he must go and see whether anything had happened to her, he got up and once more went home. Meanwhile the shepherds began to count their flock, and presently found that a sheep was missing. It was Mac, of course!—who else could have stolen it?—and at once in a body they rushed to his house, and insisted upon searching it.

No sheep could they find, and Mac and his wife pretended to be so angry at being disturbed, that at last the shepherds were leaving the cottage in despair, when an idea occurred to one of them.

He suddenly exclaimed that he would like to give something to the little baby.

"Mac, by your leave, let me give your bairn but sixpence," he said.

"Nay, go 'way, he sleeps," returned Mac. *"When he wakens he weeps,"* he added. *"I pray you go hence."*

"Give me leave him to kiss, and lift up the clout," begged one of the other men. And before Mac's wife could prevent him he had pulled down the blanket.

"He has a long snout!" exclaimed the shepherd,

who had only caught one glimpse of the strange "baby" in the cradle.

But Mac's wife was most indignant, and at once declared that it was a beautiful baby :

" A pretty child is he
As sits upon a woman's knee ;
A dylly-downe, perdie,
To make a man laugh ! "

But all she could say was useless, for by this time of course the shepherds were very suspicious, and the sheep was pulled out from the cradle, while the market-place rang with laughter. The angry shepherds, seizing a blanket, now forced Mac into it, and to the huge delight of the crowd, before returning to their field they tossed him violently, as a punishment for his evil-doing.

The laughter caused by this farce had scarcely died away when the serious part of the performance began. A second stage had been drawn meanwhile to the market-place, and was stationed at a little distance from the first one, where to the shepherds, once more quietly guarding their flock, there suddenly appeared an angel. The simple countrymen gazed in awe, while in a sweet voice he sang *Gloria in Excelsis*, and then, as he came closer, they sank on their knees, while he addressed them :

" Rise, gracious, hired-men, for now is He born
That shall take from the fiend that Adam had lorn [lost] . . .
God is made your friend : now at this morn
He behests [commands]

To Bedlem go see
There lies that free [Divine One]
In a crib full poorly,
Betwixt two beasts."

In amaze the shepherds listened, and in amaze they talked together when the shining angel had gone.

Pointing to a brilliant star, one of them declared it was a token to guide them "where the young Child lay."

"Hie we thither quickly ;
If we be wet and weary,
To that Child and that Lady,"

another urged. And so descending from the stage-field, they began their journey to Bethlehem, a journey represented by the space between the two pageants.

On the other platform meanwhile a charming scene was disclosed. There was the stable at Bethlehem, with its broken roof, and within the stable Mary in a long blue robe knelt beside the manger, at which, with their kind, patient eyes, an ox and an ass were also gazing.

Now the shepherds had arrived, and finding themselves in the presence of "that Child and that Lady," they bent low their knees, and began to talk to the Baby JESUS as though they loved Him, and as though He were a child of their own to whom they had brought tiny presents.

"Hail, comely and clean ; hail, young child !"
said the first shepherd.

“Lo, He merry is ;
Lo, He laughs, my sweeting,
A welcome meeting !
I have given my greeting,
Have a bob of cherries ?”

Then in the same homely, delightful way, the second shepherd greeted the Baby :

“Hail, Sovereign Saviour, for Thou hast us sought !
Hail ! I kneel and I cower. . . . A bird have I brought
To my bairn.
Hail, little tiny mop [little tiny pate] . . .
Little day-starn [star].”

And the third shepherd said :

“Hail, darling dear, full of Godhead !
I pray Thee be near when that I have need. . . .
Hail, put forth Thy dall [hand],
I bring Thee but a ball :
Have and play Thee with all,
And go to the tennis.”

Mary, bending down to the shepherds, then spoke to them gently, telling them that she would pray her Son to keep them from woe, and bidding them spread the glad tidings of His birth. After a while the shepherds left her presence, singing glad songs in honour of the new-born King.

“I like that best of all, except Abraham and Isaac !” Margery exclaimed, as the pageants were drawn away. “And *now* we shall see the wicked King Herod, shan’t we ?”

VIII

KING HEROD, THE WISE MEN, AND THE
MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

THAT the children should long to see the pageant in which Herod appeared was no wonder, for he was a very well-known character in the miracle plays. Just as in some fairy tales the wicked giant is well known, and is always expected to be as wicked as possible, so in these plays Herod was always represented as a furious tyrant and a great boaster, who raged and stormed and used such exaggerated language that he seemed more like a madman than a sane human being. Though in the time of Queen Elizabeth miracle plays were growing rare, it is just possible that Shakespeare as a boy may have seen some of them, and when he makes Hamlet say that one of the actors in the play-scene "out-herods Herod," he may have been thinking of the particular stamping and shouting Herod whom he himself had watched. But in any case, during the lifetime of Shakespeare the memory of the furious king must have lingered in the minds of old people at Stratford-on-Avon, many of whom as children must

often have seen him blustering and screaming and ordering people to be killed.

At the windows of Master Robert Harpham's house at any rate, on this June day when Henry V was king, there was much talk about the coming "Herod," who was said to be an excellent player and to rage more furiously than any of the actors who had taken part in previous years. Excitement therefore ran high, when the Goldsmiths' pageant drew up, for in their play—*The Three Kings coming from the East*—Herod was for the first time to appear.

The stage represented Herod's palace. It was a very small palace, and it looked something like an enlarged sentry-box, brightly painted and ornamented at the top with a dome and various pinnacles. From its doorway, on to the space in front of it, there presently stepped a herald, who in these pompous words announced the coming of the King :

"Peace, Lord Barons of great renown !
 Peace, Sir Knights of noble presence !
 Peace, gentleman companions of noble order !
 I command that all of you keep silence.
 Peace, while your noble king is in presence !
 Let no person stint to pay him deference ;
 Be not bold to strike, but keep your hearts in patience,
 And to your lord keep heart of reverence,
 For he, your king, has all *puissance* !
 In the name of the law, I command you peace !
 And King Herod—" *la grandeaboly vos umport.*"

The last words, spoken by the herald in a low voice and with a knowing smile, were greeted with a roar of

delight, for Herod was to some extent a comic character, at whom every one might laugh and "*la grande aboly vos umport*" is bad French for "*the devil run away with you!*"

And now Herod himself majestically strode forth, and again laughter, half derisive, half admiring, rang out, for in spite of all the boasting and stamping which every one knew was coming, he made a magnificent figure.

Dressed as a Saracen, he wore wonderful Eastern robes, and a jewelled turban. His black hair was dishevelled, his face red and angry, and with his flashing eyes, and huge flashing sword, he looked formidable enough.

"*Qui status in Jude ex Rex Israel,*" he began in a loud commanding tone.

"That means—'He that reigns King in Judea and Israel,'" explained Master Gyseburn to the children. "Now listen to his boasting."

"*Qui status in Jude et Rex Israel,
And the mightiest conquerer that ever
Walked on ground*" (Herod went on),
"For I am even he that made both heaven and hell,
And of my mighty power holdeth up this world round.
I am the cause of this great light and thunder.
It is through my fury that they such noise do make.
My fearful countenance the clouds doth so encumber,
That often for dread thereof the very earth doth shake."

This was only part of the foolish king's boasting, for he went on to declare that with one word he could

destroy the whole world from the north unto the south ; that he was prince of purgatory and chief captain of hell. No tongue, he declared, could tell of his possessions, his wealth, and his power. At last, turning to his servant the herald, he warned him to allow no strangers to pass through the realm without paying tribute to him, and bade him be gone hastily,

“For they that will the contrary,
Upon a gallows hanged shall be.”

Then ordering “trumpets, viols, and other harmony” to announce his presence to all the world, Herod re-entered the palace, and the herald departed to do his bidding.

Now appeared riding through the market-place in great state, two of the three kings from the East. They were mounted on white horses with beautiful trappings, and each horse had a long cloth of velvet over his back. The kings were Gaspar (or Jaspar) and Balthazar. The first was an old man with a long white beard, the second a man in the prime of life. They both wore crowns of gold upon which the sunshine sparkled, and their dresses of wonderful colours were embroidered with jewels. Both of them had seen the Star in the East, and from a far country had followed it into Herod’s kingdom. As they rode, they talked together, reminding one another that the prophets had foretold the birth of a wonderful Child.

Presently, riding from another direction, came the third king, Melchior, a handsome youth also crowned and richly clothed. He was looking about him as he came, evidently seeking some guide, and his words showed that he too had seen the Star in the East.

“I ride wandering in ways wide,
Over mountains and dales, I wot not where I am.
Now King of all kings send me such guide,
That I may have knowledge of this country’s name. . . .
Two kings yonder, I see, and to them will I ride,
For to have their company I trust they will me abide [await].”

Spurring his horse, he rode up to the two monarchs and addressed them :

“Hail, comely kings augent [gentle],
Good sirs, I pray you, whither are ye meant ?”

“To seek a Child is our intent,
Which betokens yonder star as ye may see,”

said the old king, Gaspar.

“To whom I purpose this present,”

added Balthazar, showing him a golden vase full of frankincense.

Then the third king, Melchior, replied,

“Sirs, I pray you, and that right humbly,
With you that I may ride in company ;
To Almighty God now pray we
That His precious person we may see.”

Thus having greeted one another, the kings rode aside, while on the pageant, Herod came out of his

palace to meet the herald, who, on seeing him, exclaimed :

“Hail, Lord, most of might !
Thy commandment is right.
Into thy land is come this night
Three kings, and with them a great company.”

“What make those kings in this country ?”

returned Herod.

“To seek a King and a Child, they say,”
answered the herald.

“Of what age should He be ?”

Herod inquired angrily.

“Scant twelve days old fully,”
said the herald.

Whereupon Herod, restraining his wrath, commanded the herald on pain of death to follow the kings, to speak gently to them, in order to deceive them into imagining that they would be well treated, and then to speed in hot haste to Jerusalem to make inquiries about the Child they sought.

So the herald, descending from the stage, followed Gaspar, Balthazar, and Melchior, and very courteously told them that Herod, “king of these countries wide,” desired to speak with them. The travellers, immediately agreeing to his wish, were brought before the palace. There Herod received them courteously, wished them a safe journey, and begged them to return the same way.



ENTRANCE OF THE MAGI.

Original
of the
Magi
carp

“And with great concord banquet with me,
And that Child myself then will I see
And honour Him also,”

he added, allowing his guests to depart with many compliments on either side.

But no sooner had they mounted their horses and ridden away than Herod's rage blazed forth.

“When they come again, they shall die that same day,
And thus these vile wretches to death shall be brought !”

he exclaimed, stalking into his palace, while the kings rode a little distance to another pageant where again the stable at Bethlehem was represented, with Mary watching by the manger.

Here, just as the shepherds had done, but in much more stately language, they offered their costly gifts to the Child.

Gaspar gave a cup of gold. “*In tokening Thou art without peer,*” he said, as he laid his offering at the foot of the manger.

A cup full of frankincense was Balthazar's gift, “*In tokening of priesthood and dignity of office ;*” while the young king Melchior had brought a precious goblet, with “*myrrh for mortality, in tokening Thou shalt mankind restore to life by Thy death upon a tree.*”

Then Mary spoke to the kings as sweetly as she had addressed the shepherds, and presently they withdrew a little from her presence and began to discuss their homeward journey. Gaspar declared that ac-

ording to their promise they must return through Herod's land ; and though the others agreed, they were all so fatigued that they decided to lie down and rest awhile. Accordingly, at a distance from the manger, they threw themselves on the ground. Before long they slept, and while they slept, a beautiful vision appeared to them.

An angel, who seemed to be hovering in the air, descended from the darkness of the stable-roof, and bent still hovering above them.

"Is he *really* flying?" exclaimed Margery, in an awed voice ; and Master Gyseburn smiled.

"It looks as though he were, certainly," he agreed ; "but there's a clever contrivance arranged by the carpenters and fastened to the roof up there, by which the angel is let down and made to look as though he were fluttering in the air."

"He is *lovely*!" declared Margery, sighing with pleasure. "Look at his golden curls and his long wings! What is he going to say to the kings?"

"Listen!" Colin advised her.

"King of Tarsus, Sir Gaspar!" (exclaimed the angel)
King of Araby, Sir Balthazar!
Melchior, King of Aginara!
To you now I am sent.
For dread of Herod, go you west home . . .
The HOLY GHOST this knowledge hath sent."

Then, bending a moment longer over the still sleeping kings, he flew upwards and was lost to sight.

When the kings awoke, it was to discover that each one of them had heard the angel's warning ; so taking a last leave of the Babe and His Mother, they set out on their journey, carefully arranging not to pass through the dominions of the wicked and treacherous Herod.

Meanwhile, the herald, in fear and trembling, once more ascended the steps leading to the palace-portal, and broke the news to his master :

"These three kings that forth were sent,
And should have come again before thee here present,
Another way, Lord, home they went,
Contrary to thine honour."

Then indeed the audience had an opportunity of watching Herod's rage :

"Another way !" (he exclaimed, trembling with fury)
"Out ! Out ! Out !
Hath those foul traitors done me this deed ?
I stamp, I stare, I look all about ;
Might them I take I should them burn at a glade [fire].
I rend, I roar, and now run I wood [mad] . . .
They shall be hanged if I come them to."

Roaring and stamping and raving, as he said of himself, the king rushed down the pageant steps and "raged" in the market-place amongst the people, to the delight of the grown-up folk and the terror of the children in the crowd. And all the while he was running to-and-fro, screaming with fury, he was giving orders that "all young children" should be slain.

But even the rough soldiers who had come from the palace to follow their master, and had at last succeeded in getting him to return to the stage, were horrified at this cruel command, and one of them spoke indignantly :

“My Lord, King Herod by name,
Thy words against my will shall be.
To see so many young children die is shame,
Therefore counsel thereto gettest thou none of me.”

Another one agreed with his companion, and warned Herod that to murder little children in such wholesale fashion would be sufficient provocation for a general rising among his subjects.

“A rising! Out! Out! Out!”

shouted the mad tyrant ; and, raging and stamping once more, he commanded both soldiers to be hanged on the gallows unless they immediately carried out his orders.

So for very fear the soldiers were obliged to obey, and Herod drove them forth to do the cruel deed, telling them to bring all the little dead children “before his sight,” so that he might be sure his orders had been carried out.

But now the attention of the audience was directed towards the other pageant representing the Stable at Bethlehem. Here the beautiful angel who had already appeared to the three kings was seen fluttering down towards the Mother of JESUS and her husband Joseph, and soon his voice was heard :

"Mary and Joseph, to you I say,
Sweet word from the FATHER I bring you full right;
Out of Bethlehem into Egypt forth go ye the way,
And with you take the King, full of might,
For dread of Herod's red [order]."

In reply, Joseph turned to Mary :

"Arise up, Mary, hastily and soon!
Our LORD's will needs must be done,
Like as the angel bade."

And Mary answered :

"Meekly, Joseph, mine own spouse,
Toward that country let us repair;
In Egypt—some tokens of house—
God grant us grace safe to come there!"

While she spoke, she was tenderly lifting the Baby from His cradle, and the curtains closed upon the Holy Family making preparations for their journey.

The play now went on in the street, for presently, threading their way through the crowd, a company of women entered, each bearing in her arms her little baby. And as the mothers walked to-and-fro and rocked their children, they sang this pretty song :

"Lulla, lulla, thou little tiny child;
By, by, lullay, lullay, thou little tiny child.
By, by, lully, lullay.

O sisters too! how may we do,
For to preserve this day
This poor youngling for whom we do sing,
By, by, lully, lullay.

Herod the king, in his raging,
Charged he hath this day
His men of might, in his own sight,
All young children to slay.

That woe is me, poor child, for thee !
And ever, morn and day,
For thy parting neither say nor sing,
By, by, lully, lullay."

The poor distracted mothers, with their faces full of grief, won the pity of the crowd, and many women exclaimed aloud, half believing that the babies were really going to be snatched from them and killed !

Then one of the women, in a voice shaken with fear, sang alone :

"I lull my child wondrously sweet,
And in my arms I do it keep,
Because that it should not cry."

And another replied, calling on the new-born King :

"That Babe that is born in Bethlehem so meek,
He save my child and me from villainy."

Yet another said :

"Be still ! be still ! my little child !
That Lord of lords save both thee and me ;
For Herod hath sworn with words wild
That all young children slain they shall be."

Now the soldiers come rushing forward with drawn swords, and though Colin assured her that it was only pretence, Margery could not look while they grasped the screaming women by the arms or by the hair and snatched their little baby-boys away from them.

In vain the poor mothers struggled and implored. Their children were all killed, and presently the soldiers went away to fetch "wains and wagons" on which to heap the little bodies.

"I suppose they are only dolls?" Margery asked anxiously; but though Master Gyseburn reassured her, she could not bear the sound of the screams and the shouting.

It was a relief when all the women went sobbing away, and the herald stood once more before King Herod, and addressed him:

"Herod, king! I shall thee tell,
All thy deeds is come to naught.
This Child is gone into Egypt to dwell,
Lo, sir, in thine own land what wonders
byn [have been] wrought."

Margery sympathized deeply with the herald's indignant tone.

"He's killed all the babies, and it was no good after all!" she exclaimed. "He's the wickedest and the most horrid man I ever saw! Look at him 'raging' again! What is he going to do now? See! the servants are getting his horse ready."

"He's going to ride into Egypt to see if he can find the three kings, to put them to death," said Master Gyseburn.

"But he won't!" observed Colin with much satisfaction. "There he goes riding through the crowd,

still storming. Now he's out of sight—and a good thing too."

The last they saw of Herod was his huge sword brandished aloft; and the last sound they heard was his foolish voice raised in anger.

IX

AT THE END OF THE DAY

THE children had been so absorbed and interested in the last play, which was a long one, that when the pageant was wheeled away, they were surprised to find the market-place all glowing in the light of sunset. Little pink clouds like feathers were floating in the sky, across which flights of birds were winging their way to nests in the trees round the city.

"Giles will soon be home!" said Mistress Harpham. "If there's time for one more play this evening I shall be mistaken. It will soon be dark."

"Do they stop when it gets dark?" asked Margery.

"But there are lots more to come!" objected Colin, looking at the "pageant book" which Master Gyseburn held open on his knee. Though he could not read, he saw by the long list which followed the *Massacre of the Innocents* that scarcely half of the plays had as yet been performed.

Mistress Harpham had turned away to superintend

arrangements for the supper she was about to offer her guests, but Master Gyseburn answered the children's questions.

"The plays will go on all day to-morrow, and the next day too, I expect," he told them. "It very seldom happens that any town gets through all its pageants on one day. Certainly not here in York, where we generally act forty of them."

"But suppose it gets dark in the middle of a play?" asked Margery. "What happens then?"

"Then the torch-bearers are called out," said Master Gyseburn. "I expect they'll be needed before the next one is over," he added. "The daylight will scarcely last."

"And they'll go on to-morrow, and we shan't be here!" sighed Margery, so dolefully that Master Gyseburn laughed.

"You're not tired of them? And yet you've had a long day of it!"

"Tired? Oh! I should love to see every one of them!" Margery declared.

"And so should I," echoed her brother.

"A great many sad and dreadful scenes will come to-morrow," said Master Gyseburn. "I really think you've seen all that would please you. The others are for grown-up people. And some are too horrible for *them*," he added. "At least I think so."

"Now children, come to supper!" called Mistress Harpham, who was busy lighting candles on the

table, for the room with its dark oak-panelling, and heavy beams overhead, was growing very gloomy.

"We shall have to think about saying good-bye directly!" declared Farmer Short as he took his seat. "'Tis a long ride home, and we have to get the horses out of the stable."

"Plenty of time for a meal!" said Mistress Harpham, bustling about and filling the children's plates with good things.

"Will Giles come before we have to go?" asked Margery. "I do hope he will!"

Almost as she spoke, the door opened, and Giles came in.

He was welcomed rapturously by all the guests, and though the poor boy looked very tired, he was made to answer a hundred questions about the success of the Parchment-makers' pageant in other parts of the town.

It had been well received everywhere apparently; and though Giles was very modest, his mother learnt with pride that her son's acting had been praised almost as much as she desired.

"We missed you so much after you went," whispered Margery to her cousin, a little shyly, for she was still very much impressed at the thought of his talents.

"But Master Gyseburn explained everything to us," put in Colin. "And all the plays were *splendid*!"

Before long there was a general bustle and movement round the table. Many of the guests, like the children, had a long way to go to reach their homes, and they were anxious to set out before the day's pageants were quite over.

"There'll be a fine crowd in the streets by the time they're all done," said Master Harpham. "But if you go now, while some of the folk are still looking at the plays, you'll reach the inn without much trouble."

"Aye, and Robert will go with you and show you the quickest by-ways to reach it ; won't you, Robert?" suggested his wife, as she prepared to follow Mistress Short and the children to the best bedroom, where they had left their cloaks.

Colin and Margery were soon ready, and with their little hoods tied round their necks they returned to the parlour, and ran eagerly to the window, anxious up to the last moment to see all that was going on.

They found Giles kneeling on one of the wide window-seats, looking out into the street, and Margery climbed up beside him. She had taken a great fancy to her clever, interesting cousin, and she thought how pretty he looked with his fair head resting against the woodwork of the window.

"What are they doing now?" she asked before her own curly head appeared above the level of the window-sill.

"*The Child Jesus in the Temple*," said Giles. "It's the Spur-makers' and Bit-makers' pageant, and Andrew

Martin is the Child JESUS. He's a friend of mine," he added.

"Oh! the torch-bearers are there!" exclaimed Colin. "It *has* got dark quickly!"

"Doesn't it look nice in this light?" said Margery; and Giles nodded, too intent upon the play to reply.

At the foot of the pageant, all holding flaming torches aloft, four boys were stationed, and the ruddy glow flickered over a beautiful group on the stage. The learned doctors in their long robes leant upon one another's shoulders or whispered together, their eyes fixed upon a youthful figure in their midst, Who in a grave yet charming voice was reading something from a roll of parchment.

"It's JESUS when He was a Boy, isn't it?" whispered Margery; and again Giles nodded.

The boy wore a long sheepskin coat, and his fair hair was made brighter by gilding. His legs were bare, and on his feet were sandals.

"Andrew is wonderful!" said Giles gravely, "all his gestures are good and dignified. And so is his voice. This was the part they wanted me to play, but I would not attempt it. I knew Andrew would do it better."

Margery glanced at her cousin admiringly. In her little mind she felt sure that Giles too was wonderful, and that all she had heard about the great things he was to do in the future had not been exaggerated. Some day, she was certain, Giles would be a famous

man. Her thoughts were put to flight, however, by the entrance of her mother and a large company of other guests all ready for departure ; so leave-takings were very hurried.

But she found time to hug Giles, who in spite of the laughter which went round, allowed himself to be kissed with very good grace.

"We will go out by the back way," called Master Harpham, and the children soon found themselves in a quiet street, where the noise from the market-place sounded only as a faint murmur.

By winding lanes and passages Master Harpham led his guests towards the "Dragon" inn where they had left their horses and their wagons. Every now and then however, when they turned a corner, Margery and Colin caught a glimpse of a crowd, of flaming torches, and of the top of one of the pageants stationed sometimes half-way up a street, sometimes in a little open space, sometimes beneath a city gate.

"They are still going on !" Colin exclaimed.

"Yes ; but only till the pageant of the *Doctors in the Temple* has been played at the last halting-place," said Master Harpham, looking back over his shoulder at the little boy. "It's all over for to-night in our market-place, for instance ; but the Doctors' play won't reach Girdlegate, the last place, for another half-hour, perhaps. . . . Now, here's the inn ! Hurry, all of you, and you will get out your horses before there's too much of a crush."

Dobbin and Jock, looking quite fresh after their long day's rest, were soon led out from their corner of the stables, and in a moment Margery was perched on Dobbin's back, in front of her father.

"Good-nights" were called, and, in company with various other travellers, the children rode along the cobble-paved streets towards Mikelgate, from which the pageants had long ago departed, leaving the road to the gate clear.

"'Tis luck to have moonlight!" exclaimed Farmer Short, as they emerged upon the country-road.

Margery looked back towards the city they had left, over which hung a dull red glow from the torchlights which still streamed and flickered there; and as she looked she drew a long sigh.

"She's tired!" said her mother; but Margery indignantly denied the fact.

"I was thinking what a lovely day it's been," she declared; "and about all the plays they will be acting to-morrow and the next day. But Master Gyseburn says they will be sad plays. So perhaps I shouldn't like to see them after all. I didn't like it when the babies were killed!"

"Yes," said a neighbour; "there are about twenty still to come. They'll need two days more at least. The saddest plays will come last, when the Tapestry-weavers act the *Trial of Christ*; and the Tile-makers and Painters *The Crucifixion*."

"'Twas a mercy it was fine," exclaimed Mistress

Short. "And likely to be fine to-morrow," she added, with a glance at the clear sky, in which a full moon sailed.

Both the children grew silent as they jogged towards home along the white road, upon which fell their shadows and the shadows of the horses and of overhanging trees. It was very quiet and peaceful in the country, and they were both sleepy. All the curious and novel things they had seen during the day began to appear like a dream, in which the three kings passed and re-passed ; and Herod, with his flashing sword, stamped and raved ; and beautiful angels, with golden wings, hovered above a stable in Bethlehem ; and the serpent talked to Adam and Eve. But more frequently than any of the other figures in the plays Margery saw the little white-robed Isaac begging for his life ; and, when the cottage was reached at last, and she was in bed and really asleep, it was of him she dreamt.

X

EVERYMAN

As some of you may have noticed, the miracle plays to which long ago Colin and Margery listened were for the most part badly written, in such rough, uncouth verse, that a great deal of each play may be described as mere doggerel. Very few of them have any claim to be called *literature*. They are just rhyming stories, often very badly rhymed, to be acted before uncritical people, thousands of whom were poor and simple folk who, if the stories were sufficiently exciting and the actors well enough dressed, neither knew nor cared that the words were poor. Every now and then, indeed, in these old plays a fragment of verse is charming. For instance, in the Nativity scene, which used to be acted at Coventry, there are some delightful words. Here are a few lines from the prophets' speeches about the new-born King.

Second prophet :

“Yet do I marvel
In what pile or castle
These herdsmen did Him see”

And the first prophet replies :

“Neither in halls not yet in bowers,
Born would He not be,
Neither in castles nor in towers
That seemly were to see ;
But at His FATHER’s will,
The prophecy to fulfil,
Betwixt an ox and an ass
JESU this King born He was.”

The lullaby to the babies in the same play is pretty too, and so is the shepherds’ song when the angels have announced to them the birth of CHRIST. Here are the words :

“As I out rode this enderes’ night,
Of three jolly shepherds I saw a sight,
And all about their fold a star shone bright ;
They sang, Terli, ter low ;
So merrily the shepherds their pipes can blow.”

But the best of all the plays is one that does not appear in either of the four sets known as the York, the Coventry, the Chester, and the Wakefield series. It was probably first written in Dutch, and afterwards translated into English. For we must remember that not only in England were these miracle plays acted ; they were just as popular in France, in Germany, and in Holland, as in our own country. This particular play is called *Everyman*, and it is in many ways different from any of the pageants we have so far talked about.

In the first place, instead of being a Bible story, it is an allegory, something like the allegory of the *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Just as Christian, the “Pilgrim,”

stands for any human being born into this world and passing through it on his way to another life, so Everyman means just what the word says. Every man or woman of us. *Everyone*, in fact ; since every one of us is born into this world and, after journeying through life, has to pass out of it at the gate of death.

Though the play is so old (it was first written and acted, perhaps, in the reign of Henry V), it remains true for people who live nowadays, and for the people who will live after us. Not only because it is true, but also because it is so dignified and touching, certain people who lately read it, thought that it might very well be acted again, and presented as nearly as possible in the same way as it was played by actors in bygone days—five hundred years ago.

So men and women were found to study it, to learn the parts, and to copy old dresses for the characters, and the first revival performance of *Everyman* was given in London some years ago, in the open air, at Charterhouse, the old city school for boys. Since then it has been acted in many theatres, but perhaps that first performance was the best of all, because the play, like all other miracle plays, was meant to be acted out of doors, and Charterhouse, with its old courtyard and its old grey walls, was the best frame that could possibly have been devised for an old play.

In the courtyard of Charterhouse, then, a big wooden platform or scaffolding was set up, close against the

wall of the school chapel. Steps at either end of the platform led down to the cobble-paved yard, and on the wooden stage itself, there were one or two little recesses, like shrines, hidden by curtains. There was no other scenery.

Some of the spectators sat on benches in front of the platform, and all the windows looking into the courtyard were filled with people, just as the windows overlooking that market-place in York were crowded, when miracle plays were acted long ago. And just as some of those plays began with the coming of a herald to explain what was going to take place, so this play of *Everyman* began with the appearance of a messenger or *doctor*. He was dressed in a long black gown, something like those still worn by the dons and students at Oxford or Cambridge. Round his neck was a white ruff, and on his head a flat cap of velvet. Coming from one of the doorways which opened into the courtyard, he walked towards the platform, ascended its steps, and addressed the audience, beginning with these words.

Messenger :

“I pray you all give your audience,
And hear this matter with reverence,
By figure a moral play—
The *Summoning of Everyman* called it is,
That to our lives and ending shows
How transitory we be all day.
This matter is wondrous precious,
But the intent of it is more gracious
And sweet to bear away.”

Continuing, he reminded his listeners that *Everyman* would be required to give an account of his life before "the Heaven King," and he called upon them to listen to the voice of the Almighty Himself.

His speech ended, he left the platform, and in a moment, a stately figure representing GOD the FATHER appeared at the chapel window which overhung the stage, in much the same way as five hundred years ago GOD Almighty used to come from a window above the church porch.

A balcony with a stone balustrade projected from the window, and leaning upon it the Figure, dressed as in olden days, like a pope, in costly robe and mitre, addressed the audience.

"I perceive here in My Majesty
How all creatures are to Me unkind"—

He began in solemn tones—

"Living without dread in worldly prosperity ;
Of ghostly sight the people be so blind,
Drowned in sin they know Me not for their God."

He reminded them of the great Sacrifice which seemed to have passed from their thoughts.

"My law that I showed, when I for them died,
They forget clean, and shedding of My blood red ;
I hanged between two, it cannot be denied ;
To get them life, I suffered to be dead ;
I healed their feet, with thorns hurt was My head ;
I could do no more than I did truly,
And now I see the people do clean forsake Me."

"And now," went on the Almighty, "I must bring Everyman to a reckoning, for he is so cumbered with worldly riches that he forgets how all riches and pleasures are only lent to him for a time, and are to be used for My glory. I will send Death to him."

"Where art thou, *Death*, thou mighty messenger?"

He called in grave accents. Then from a door beneath the stage there came a curious and grotesque creature.

He was like a skeleton; or rather the bones of a skeleton were painted on his close-fitting dress of black leather. The mask of a skull was over his face; his head was crowned with fading roses, and he carried a drum, upon which he beat with warning blows.

"Almighty God, I am here at your will,
Your commandment to fulfil" (said Death).

"Go thou to *Everyman*,
And show him in My Name
A pilgrimage he must on him take,
Which he in no wise may escape" (commanded God the
FATHER).

To whom Death replied that he would run the world over and search for all who lived "out of God's laws."

"Lo, yonder I see *Everyman* walking! (he exclaimed suddenly)—
Full little he thinketh on my coming."

And indeed it seemed as though the slim and handsome youth who at that moment came from one of the houses in the courtyard had never thought seriously of anything. Careless and light-hearted, beautifully dressed, and playing on a lute as he walked,

he was thinking only of amusement and gaiety, when, as he reached the platform, he was suddenly confronted with Death.

"*Everyman*, stand still ! (commanded the mighty messenger).

Whither art thou going

Thus gaily ? Hast thou thy Master forgot ?"

At these words poor *Everyman* trembled and hesitated, and Death went on to say that he had been sent to him in great haste "from GOD out of His Majesty" to tell him he was bidden to take a long journey and to bring with him his book of reckoning, to answer before GOD for all his deeds in this, his present life. In vain *Everyman* begged for a delay.

"O *Death*" (he cried), "thou comest when I had thee least in mind !

In thy power it lieth me to save,

Yet of my good will I give thee, if ye will be kind—

Yea, a thousand pound shalt thou have,

And defer this matter till another day."

But Death replied that "to cry, weep, and pray" was of no avail, since he took neither gold, silver, nor riches from pope, emperor, king, duke, nor princes. He must instantly set forth on the journey from which there was no returning.

Then, in his great trouble, *Everyman* called upon GOD :

"O gracious God, in the high seat celestial,

Have mercy on me in this most need ! . . .

Shall I have no company from this vale terrestrial ?"

he asked of Death. For he dreaded to take the long journey alone.

"Yea, if any be so hardy
That would go with thee and bear thee company,"

Death replied.

Then Everyman began to think of his friends, and to wonder which of them loved him well enough to go with him into the Valley of the Shadow of Death. And presently he saw *Good Fellowship* approaching. Now in this story "*Good Fellowship*" means all the companions with whom Everyman had spent gay and delightful hours—men with whom he had laughed and jested; men who had professed the greatest affection for him. So when he saw the smiling face of Fellowship, he was full of hope, and he went eagerly to meet him.

"*Everyman*, good-morrow by this day (said *Fellowship*);
Sir, why lookest thou so piteously?
If anything be amiss, I pray thee, me say,
That I may help to remedy."

Everyman admitted that he was in great trouble, and nothing could have been kinder than Fellowship's voice, as he declared himself ready to do anything for his friend. If any one had wronged him, he was ready to kill the offender. That he would never forsake his dear companion Everyman might rest assured.

So, greatly consoled, Everyman told him that he must take a long journey, and he begged that Fellowship would be his travelling companion. Then, for the first time, the gay and cheerful fellow began to look serious. "I promised not to forsake you," he

said ; " but we must discuss the matter at greater length. If we took such a journey, when should we come again ? "

" Nay, never again till the day of doom," answered Everyman sadly.

At these words Fellowship started back in fear.

" Who hath you these tidings brought ? " he asked in a strange voice.

" Indeed, Death was with me here," Everyman replied.

Then Fellowship, more than ever afraid, absolutely refused to go on a journey commanded by Death. If Everyman had wanted him to eat and drink with him, or to help him in any of his pleasures, he would never have forsaken him, he declared. Even if he had wanted him to commit murder he would have been ready to serve him. But this request was an impossible one, so impossible that he would not even accompany him as far as the town gates.

So, very mournfully, Everyman wished him farewell, gazing after him as he hurried away, a brilliant figure in his scarlet doublet and hose, with his sword clanking at his side.

Good Fellowship had failed him ; " but surely," thought Everyman, " my own relations will be faithful to me in my sorrow ? " And when he saw them strolling across the courtyard, hope once more revived in his heart.

Of the little company of young men who now came

on to the platform, one was Everyman's cousin, of whom he was very fond ; and this cousin, seeing that something was wrong, begged for an explanation, which, in these words, Everyman gave :

“ Gramercy, my friends and kinsmen kind,
Now shall I show you the grief of my mind :
I was commanded by a messenger,
That is an high King's chief officer ;
He bade me go a pilgrimage, to my pain,
And I know well I shall never come again ;
Also I must give a reckoning straight,
For I have a great enemy that lieth me in wait,
Which intendeth me for to hinder.”

Now, as he spoke, the faces of the young men grew very grave and anxious.

“ What account is that which ye must render ?
That would I know,”

demanded one of them.

And Everyman replied :

“ Of all my works I must show
How I have lived and my days spent ;
Also of ill deeds that I have used
In my time, sith life was me lent ;
And of all virtues that I have refused.
Therefore I pray you go thither with me
To help to make mine account, for Saint Charity.”

But the kinsmen started back in horror.

“ Nay, Everyman, I had liefer fast bread and water
All this five year and more !”

exclaimed one of them.

And the cousin said :

“ I have the cramp in my toe. Trust not to me.”

One by one they hastened away, and poor Everyman was left lamenting, till suddenly a thought struck him :

“ All my life I have loved riches ” (he reflected) ;
If that my Good [wealth] now help me might,
He would make my heart full light.
I will speak to him in this distress.
Where art thou, my *Goods* and riches ? ”

No sooner had he called, than the curtains before one of the recesses on the stage slid back, and disclosed a man richly dressed, seated within. Before him money-bags were piled, and huge chests containing gold and precious stones.

“ Who calleth me ? ” (said *Goods*). “ Everyman ? What haste thou hast ! . . .
What would ye have, lightly me say.”

So Everyman began to relate his trouble, while *Goods* gazed at him with his cold inhuman eyes.

“ Therefore, I pray thee, go with me,”
concluded Everyman, falteringly ;

“ For, peradventure, thou may’st before God Almighty
My reckoning help to clean and purify ;
For it is said ever among
That money maketh all right that is wrong.”

“ Nay, Everyman, I sing another song ;
I follow no man in such voyages,”

declared *Goods* ; and, when Everyman spoke to him indignantly,

"What, weenest [imaginest] thou that I am thine?"
he exclaimed.

"I had wend [imagined] so,"
stammered Everyman.

"Nay, Everyman; I say no!"
returned Goods; and went on to assure him that *Goods* were only lent, and that they generally killed a man's soul. Then, in his great despair, Everyman cursed the cruel spirit, who only laughed mockingly, refused to follow him out of this world, and before Everyman could speak again drew close the curtains of his shrine.

Once more he strove to think of some help, and, at last, he recalled *Good Deeds*, only to remember that she was so weak that she could "neither go nor speak."

"Yet will I venture on her now," he told himself.

"My *Good Deeds*, where be you?"

Again, at the other end of the stage, a recess opened, and there, lying on the ground, so feeble and starved that she could scarcely move, was a beautiful woman dressed in a long white robe embroidered with stars.

"Here I lie cold in the ground (she said faintly).

Thy sins hath me sore bound,
That I cannot stir."

Very humbly Everyman approached her, for he knew that it was through his fault that she was so weak and ill. He had neglected and scorned her, but

now she seemed his only hope, and so he implored her to take the journey with him.

"I would full fain, but I cannot stand verily," she declared. And then she showed him how his "book of accounts," in which his good deeds should have been numbered, was almost empty, and the pages were so blurred and the letters so confused that Everyman could not decipher them. He was almost beside himself with grief and fear, when Good Deeds advised him to seek counsel of her sister, who was called *Knowledge*, for she possibly might help him "to make that dreadful reckoning."

So Everyman stood before her shrine, and, when the curtains parted, he saw that Knowledge was grave, and beautiful, and kind.

To his great joy she promised to be his guide ; but before all things she told him he must first seek *Confession*, who would cleanse him from his sins.

So Knowledge brought him to Confession, a stately figure in a monk's cowl. Confession stepped from his shrine to counsel and instruct poor Everyman, who confessed his sins, and begged that Good Deeds might be strengthened.

Kneeling before Confession, he prayed earnestly to God, and presently Good Deeds stood at his side.

"I thank God, now I can walk and go ;
And am delivered of my sickness and woe (she said).
Therefore with Everyman I will go, and not spare.
His good works I will help him to declare."

With an encouraging smile, Knowledge bade the penitent Everyman be of good cheer ; and, with these words, she gave him a robe, which she told him to wear.

“It is (she said) a garment of sorrow :
 From pain it will you borrow ;
 Contrition it is
 That getteth forgiveness ;
 It pleaseth God passing well.

So Everyman put on the sad-coloured robe, and was preparing to set forward on his journey with the two beautiful women, when Good Deeds told him that three other people must go with them, their names being *Discretion*, *Strength*, and *Beauty*.

“Also (said Knowledge), ye must call to mind
 Your five wits [five senses] as for your counsellors.”

So Everyman called aloud, and Discretion, Strength, Beauty, and the Five Senses (or wits), one after another, came towards him. They were all splendid and stately figures, and the *Five Wits* were five beautiful women dressed in rainbow-coloured garments.

Then Good Deeds addressed them, praying them all to accompany Everyman on his last long journey, and each one in turn promised faithfully never to forsake him.

It seemed, therefore, as though the poor traveller had many friends with him after all, and when Knowledge advised him to go to a priest and take the Holy Sacrament, he consented gladly and humbly.

On his return, Everyman found his companions waiting for him, but suddenly he felt so weak that he knew he was almost at the end of that journey commanded by Death.

In the courtyard below the platform, at some distance, there was an open grave ; and looking at it he said to Beauty :

“ Friends, let us not turn again to this land,
Not for all the world’s gold ;
For into this cave must I creep
And turn to earth, and then to sleep.”

“ What ! into this grave ? Alas ! (exclaimed Beauty)
And what—should I smother here ? ”

“ Yes, by my faith (said Everyman), and never more appear ;
In this world live no more we shall,
But in heaven, before the highest LORD of all.”

Then, full of fear, Beauty declined to go with Everyman.

“ Peace, I am deaf ; I look not behind me ;
Not and thou would give me all the gold in thy chest,”

she exclaimed ; and turning from him in spite of her promise, she hurried away.

Strength followed, crying :

“ Thy game liketh me not at all ! ”

And, after him, fled Discretion, saying :

“ When Strength goeth before, I follow after evermore.”

Deserted by these three friends, Everyman, who had descended the steps of the stage, was now quite close to the grave, and the scene was very solemn

and impressive. Evening was drawing near. Long shadows were cast upon the courtyard, and across the sky, still clear, but rosy with sunset, flights of birds moved slowly. The last rays of the sun touched the roofs of the old grey houses, and the bells from the city churches near were chiming together.

One by one the beautiful figures who had forsaken him crossed the courtyard and filed back to the world, across the stage, while Everyman, in his black robe of sorrow, attended only by *Knowledge* and *Good Deeds*, stood at the brink of the tomb.

“Oh, all things faileth save God alone ! (he cried)
Beauty, Strength, and Discretion ;
For when *Death* bloweth his blast,
They all run from me full fast.”

And now the *Five Senses*, who had come near to the tomb and formed a shining group round it, also one by one turned away ; and, in a failing voice, Everyman murmured :

“O JESUS, help ! all hath forsaken me.”

But *Good Deeds*, with a sweet smile, drew close to him.

“Nay, Everyman” (she said), “I will bide with thee ;
I will not forsake thee indeed ;
Thou shalt find me a good friend at need.”

Thus Everyman found that though he had loved all his other friends better than *Good Deeds*, she alone was faithful, for even *Knowledge*, who had so far followed him, now sadly moved aside, and he knew

the truth of the words uttered at the very edge of the grave by *Good Deeds* :

“All earthly things is but vanity :
Beauty, Strength, and Discretion do man forsake ;
Foolish friends and kinsmen that fair spake,
All fleeth save *Good Deeds*, and that am I.”

Right into the grave she followed Everyman, and when, as he was sinking back, he cried :

“Have mercy on me, God most mighty ;
And stand by me, thou Mother and Maid, holy Mary !”

she answered :

“Fear not, I will speak for thee.”

And when the grave covered both of them, *Knowledge* came near, and bending over it, said :

“Now hath he suffered that we all shall endure ;
The *Good Deeds* shall make all sure.
Now hath he made an ending.”

She paused, listening, and in a joyful voice added :

“Methinketh that I hear angels sing,
And make great joy and melody,
Where Everyman’s soul received shall be.”

And indeed, almost before *Knowledge* had finished speaking, there appeared on the balcony, high above the stage, an angel with long wings of rose-colour ; and, while sweet music sounded, the angel spoke :

“Come, excellent elect spouse, to JESU : . . *
~~Thy reckoning is crystal-clear ;~~
Now shalt thou into the heavenly sphere,
Unto the which ye all shall come
That liveth well, before the day of doom.”

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So, though the play had been very sad, it ended with beautiful sights and sounds, and before the people in the audience moved, the Messenger stood once more alone upon the stage, warning them to bear the moral of *Everyman* in mind :

“Forsake pride (he said), for he deceiveth you in the end ;
And remember *Beauty, Five Wits, Strength, and Discretion* :
They all at the last do *Everyman* forsake,
Save his *Good Deeds*, there doth he take.
But beware, and they be small
Before God he hath no help at all . . .
For after death amends may no man make.”

But though this simple and beautiful old play is sometimes acted nowadays, and though many people are interested and touched whenever it is performed, yet, at any rate in England, the time for miracle plays has gone by.

If not wiser, the world has at least grown older since the days when crowds of simple and unlearned folk assembled in market-places, or on village-greens, to be taught the Bible history which they can now read for themselves.

A few men and women, it is true, occasionally write religious plays even now. There is one, for instance, called *Bethlehem*, written by Laurence Housman, which has lately been acted several times, and another by Miss Buckland, with the title of *Eager Heart*, has for six years been played every Christmas in the big hall at Lincoln's Inn.

But these modern religious dramas are like late violets blooming when the real violet time is over. It may be delightful to find them still growing here and there, but just as some flowers belong to the spring and cannot live into the summer, so the real miracle plays which flourished in the spring-time of our country's history have died away now that the country's life is older.

There is in Europe at the present day only one important religious play to which, as in olden times, thousands of people flock, and that is called the Ober Ammergau Passion Play, and is given once in ten years.

Ober Ammergau is a village in Bavaria, and the play, acted by the villagers, deals with the last days of CHRIST on earth, and is so wonderful and so beautiful that it has become very celebrated.

In a far-away German village like Ober Ammergau, where the natives are simple folk living apart from the great world, such a performance as this is still possible, and still a beautiful thing. Nevertheless it remains true that for the great mass of people the age of miracle plays is over.

But though as national events they have passed away from our country for ever, we must not forget that quite apart from the work of teaching which they once performed, they are very important in the history of our literature.

Rough and often badly written as they are, these

miracle plays prepared the way for the drama which was to follow them in the days of Queen Elizabeth. It is not too much to say that without them we might never have had *Hamlet*, nor *As you like it*, nor any of the splendid and beautiful plays of such a great dramatist as William Shakespeare.



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